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The grain silo at Welfare Square in Salt Lake City, Utah, symbolizes the blending of financial activities and spiritual purposes inherent in the work of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to care for all of God's children. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

Answering Questions About Church Finances

A Model for Rigorous Faithful Inquiry

Keith A. Erekson

Throughout the scriptures, the Savior repeatedly encourages his disciples to search, inquire, seek, and knock—to ask questions (see Matt. 5:42; 7:7; Luke 11:9; James 1:5; 1 Ne. 15:11; 2 Ne. 4:35; 3 Ne. 27:28; D&C 4:7; 18:18; 46:7). In the twenty-first century, many people have questions about the finances of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Why does a church have so much money? Why does this Church own for-profit companies? Why does the Church spend money on [insert any topic] instead of spending it on [insert another topic of personal concern]? Do Church leaders grow rich off the tithing of members? Why isn't the Church more open about its finances; what is it hiding? Did a past Church leader predict a time when members would no longer pay tithing?

This essay introduces a model for answering questions about difficult topics and then applies the model to the topic of Church finances. Along the way, I'll provide starting points for specific questions about Church finances and then demonstrate the full model in action through a case study for answering questions about a 2023 fine from the Securities and Exchange Commission. Two appendixes list recommended resources and places in Church curriculum where teachers might help youth and young adults better understand Church finances.

A Model for Answering Questions about Difficult Topics

Before examining the questions, it is best to think about what an answer is. How will we know what an answer looks and feels like when we find it? In the scriptures, the best answers are often described as being like light, warmth, and life (see Alma 32:35; D&C 50:24). In practical terms, complete

answers unite several connected components—they require accurate *information*, elimination of *errors*, and critical *thinking skills* for making sense of it all. Sound answers distill upon us as we rely on the *Holy Ghost*; they speak to the most *personal* parts of our lives and deepen our *discipleship*. Addressing questions about difficult topics is an essential part of helping people come unto Christ by enduring to the end (see 2 Ne. 31:20; 3 Ne. 27:16–17).

The Gospel Library hosts new resources for “Seeking Answers to Your Questions” and identifies five helpful principles related to these components of a complete answer:

1. Center Your Life on Jesus Christ (*Discipleship*)
2. Be Patient with Yourself and with Others (*Personal*)
3. Recognize that Revelation Is a Process (*Holy Ghost*)
4. Consult Reliable Sources (*Information*)
5. Work to Understand the Past (*Thinking Skills*)¹

Additional principles for “Helping Others with Their Questions” include: respond with love, listen with humility, trust in the Lord, nourish your own faith, and assist them throughout their journey.² People who ask questions about difficult topics need to connect all the components of a complete answer. Each asker begins from a different starting point. Some may have heard information that is incomplete, taken out of context, or erroneous. Others may know a lot of information but not know how to reconcile it. Still others may have never heard of a topic before and feel surprised or ashamed for not knowing. The best answers engage all components of a complete answer and are adapted to each asker’s individual strengths and needs.

Preparing to Answer Questions About Church Finances

Questions about Church finances often arise in connection with current news and events—the purchase of a commercial enterprise, a new lawsuit, allegations posted online, or a fine levied by a government agency. While the specifics of each breaking story may vary, the general topic of Church finances remains of perpetual interest. We can all prepare

1. “Seeking Answers to Your Questions,” Topics and Questions, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed July 28, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/seeking-answers/01-intro-seeking-answers>.

2. “Helping Others with Their Questions,” Topics and Questions, accessed July 28, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/helping-others-with-their-questions/01-introduction-helping-others>.

to answer specific questions with a general background on the parts of an answer.

Discipleship. For those who seek to center their lives on Jesus Christ, every topic provides an opportunity to teach and learn about him.³ During his mortal ministry, Jesus both established an organization to administer resources and taught principles of effective resource management. Elder D. Todd Christofferson explained that “Jesus organized His work in such a way that the gospel could be established simultaneously in multiple nations and among diverse peoples.”⁴ Jesus’s teachings also drew on wise principles that encouraged planning before building a tower (Luke 14:28–33), endorsed construction on a foundation of rocks not sand (Matt. 7:24–27), rewarded those who multiplied the financial return on their talents (Matt. 25:14–30), and complied with tax requirements (Matt. 22:21). From the beginning of the modern Restoration, the Lord’s work has required temporal resources. The organization of the Church in 1830 was emphasized as “being regularly organized and established agreeable to the laws of our country” (D&C 20:1)—an event that was both sacred (establishing the Lord’s Church) and secular (done according to law). In many ways, the Church’s current needs are similar to those of other churches that also publish scripture and instructional materials, construct places of worship, support evangelizing work, and care for the needy.⁵ But when the Risen Lord commanded his people to gather together—first in Ohio, then in Missouri,

3. “Seeking Answers to Your Questions: Center Your Life on Jesus Christ,” Topics and Questions, accessed July 28, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/seeking-answers/02-center-your-life-on-jesus-christ>; “Teach About Jesus Christ No Matter What You Are Teaching,” *Teaching in the Savior’s Way: For All Who Teach in the Home and in the Church* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2024), 6–7, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teaching-in-the-saviors-way-2022/04-part-1/05-teach-about-jesus-christ>.

4. D. Todd Christofferson, “Why the Church,” *Ensign*, November 2015, 108, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2015/11/sunday-afternoon-session/why-the-church>. See also Matthew 19:16–22 and Acts 6:1–6.

5. See Matthew C. Godfrey, “Newel K. Whitney and the United Firm,” in *Revelations in Context: The Stories Behind the Sections of the Doctrine and Covenants*, ed. Matthew McBride and James Goldberg (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2016), 142–47, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/revelations-in-context/newel-k-whitney-and-the-united-firm>; “United Firm (United Order),” Church History Topics, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed July 28, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/united-firm-united-order>; “Consecration and Stewardship,” Church History Topics, accessed July 28, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/consecration-and-stewardship>.

Illinois, and Utah—the need for resources changed and increased. If thousands of people were to migrate to and live in a place where they could receive ordinances and make covenants, then the Lord’s Church needed to become involved in real estate acquisition, economic development, long-term financial planning, and care of the poor and needy.⁶ Over time, additional expenditures have included the support of temporal welfare, education, and humanitarian aid. Today, the Church of Jesus Christ supports more than thirty thousand local congregations, thousands of meetinghouses, hundreds of temples, as well as storehouses, schools, and missionaries.⁷

Personal. All questions begin with the asker and because every asker is different, you will never answer the same question twice. Personal characteristics, attributes, and experiences shape perspectives and expectations, and it always helps to learn to “be patient with yourself and with others.”⁸ Questions about Church finances may be influenced by general or institutional distrust, personal passion, or lack of specialized information. In the twenty-first century, many people are distrustful of large organizations—governments, businesses, schools, health care systems, and churches. Large organizations often feel impersonal, overly bureaucratized, and distant. It can appear that the organization cares more for its self-preservation and enrichment than for individual concerns and needs. Further, many people carry personal passion for specific causes, such as alleviating poverty or community service for refugees. Finally, financial questions often involve specialized technical knowledge about financial markets, international tax law, or jurisdictional differences. Antagonists acting on social media can loosely charge the Church with trying to protect its tax-exempt status because most people dislike taxes and don’t understand tax laws and requirements.

Holy Ghost. Responding to questions about Church finances provides opportunities to teach about how to recognize and rely on the Holy

6. See Nathan B. Oman, “‘Established Agreeable to the Laws of Our Country’: Mormonism, Church Corporations, and the Long Legacy of America’s First Disestablishment,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 36, no. 2 (August 2021): 202–29, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-law-and-religion/article/abs/established-agreeable-to-the-laws-of-our-country-mormonism-church-corporations-and-the-long-legacy-of-america-s-first-disestablishment/CB9F9F6D26782FB6C2AE59B4612E3E2E>.

7. “Church Finances and a Growing Global Faith,” Newsroom, May 22, 2018, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/church-finances-and-a-growing-global-church>.

8. “Seeking Answers to Your Questions: Be Patient with Yourself and with Others,” Topics and Questions, accessed July 28, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/seeking-answers/03-be-patient>.



The Church Administration Building was completed in 1917 and hosts office space for the First Presidency and the Quorum of Twelve Apostles. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

Ghost. One starting point is to “recognize that revelation is a process,” for both individual Saints and Church leaders.⁹ Over the past two hundred years, Joseph Smith and subsequent Church leaders have followed both revelation and contemporary business models for financing Church endeavors. Frequently, the Lord gives instructions about outcomes and allows people to figure out the details, such as Nephi seeking the brass plates or the brother of Jared deciding how to light his barges (see 1 Ne. 3–4 and Ether 3). Modern revelations have instructed Church members to consecrate their property, time, and talents to further the Lord’s work as well as established offices and procedures for managing the oversight of donations, including the Council on the Disposition of Tithes (see D&C 41–42; 119–120). Leaders also make use of financial tools such as promissory notes, loans, stocks, and bonds. The process of revelation involves a blend of personal initiatives undertaken within specific contexts while seeking divine direction and confirmation.¹⁰

9. “Seeking Answers to Your Questions: Recognize That Revelation Is a Process,” Topics and Questions, accessed July 31, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/seeking-answers/04-recognize-revelation-is-a-process>.

10. See Gérald Caussé, “In the Lord’s Way: The Spiritual Foundations of Church Financial Self-Reliance,” in *Business and Religion: The Intersection of Faith and Finance*,

Information. Several published resources present reliable information about the history of Church finances and provide important context and perspective to modern questions.¹¹ The Church History Topics essay on “Church Finances” provides an overview of revealed instructions and practical applications. From the outset, the Church met temporal obligations by relying on donations and contributions from Church members, such as consecrated property, free-will donations, and tithing donations of labor, cash, and property.

Two periods of financial distress are important for understanding the larger history. First, during the 1880s, antipolygamy laws enacted by the United States Congress targeted Church finances, eventually disincorporating the Church and confiscating funds and properties, including the still-unfinished Salt Lake Temple. Church leaders were forced to undertake high-cost loans to make ends meet, precipitating other poor financial investments during the 1880s and 1890s that left the Church in debt until 1907.¹²

Second, during the 1950s an ambitious international building program, financed by deficit spending, created significant new debts. Apostle and former businessman N. Eldon Tanner was called to the First Presidency in 1963 and helped establish the following key principles that have long influenced Church financial practices: adhering to strict budgetary controls, saving a surplus, spending from reserves, and preparing for the future (the same counsel Church leaders give to members and families).¹³ After paying off those debts, the Church began to assume other expenses, such as paying for all local unit operating expenses in

ed. Matthew C. Godfrey and Michael Hubbard MacKay (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Deseret Book, 2019), 3–19; David W. Smith, “[The Development of the Council on the Disposition of the Tithes](#),” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (2018): 131–55.

11. “Seeking Answers to Your Questions: Consult Reliable Resources,” Topics and Questions, accessed August 2, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/seeking-answers/05-consult-reliable-sources>.

12. “Church Finances,” Church History Topics, accessed August 4, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/church-finances>; see also “Antipolygamy Legislation,” Church History Topics, accessed August 4, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/anti-polygamy-legislation>.

13. “Church Financial Administration,” Topics and Questions, accessed August 3, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/church-financial-administration>; “Church Finances,” Church History Topics; John P. Livingstone, “N. Eldon Tanner and Church Administration,” in *A Firm Foundation: Church Organization and Administration*, ed. David J. Whittaker and Arnold K. Garr (Deseret Book, 2011), 485–501.

1990, equalizing missionary funds in 1991, and dramatically expanding contributions for humanitarian aid. Continuing financial strength and a growing surplus led the Church to begin systematic long-term investment in the stock market in 1997.¹⁴

A companion Church History Topics essay on “Church Incorporation” reviews the structural history of the Church’s financial activities. When the Church moved to Illinois in 1839, there were new laws to follow (different from New York in 1830), so Joseph Smith began in 1841 to transact Church business as a trustee-in-trust, a relationship that continued until the 1920s. In 1855, the Utah territorial legislature recognized the Church as a religious corporation enabled to invest in business enterprises and public works projects. Between 1918 and 1923, Church entities were restructured into three corporations: the Corporation of the Presiding Bishop to manage charities and public worship (including meetinghouses); the Zion Securities Corporation to manage taxable and nonecclesiastical entities (including ranches and real estate, which all pay relevant business taxes); and the Corporation of the President to manage assets used for religious reasons and oversee the other two corporations. In 1966, the Deseret Management Corporation (DMC) was established as a holding company for the Church’s for-profit entities, including radio, television, printing, insurance, and the Zion Securities Corporation. In 2019, the corporations of the President and the Presiding Bishop were merged to a single corporate entity, The Church of Jesus Christ (with DMC continuing to hold for-profit entities).¹⁵

Errors. In our information age, errors are frequently mingled with facts so that learners struggle to discern truth. Often, errors originate in our assumptions and cultural expectations, or they can be imposed onto topics by rigidly enforcing either/or binary positions. Though errors sometimes appear harmless or humorous, they impede our thinking and slow our spiritual growth. The Savior modeled an effective way to identify and correct errors. When presented with a complicated question about marriage in the next life, he responded simply “Ye do err,” pointed them to truths taught in scripture, and testified of the power of God (Matt. 22:29). Common errors that circulate about Church finances include the following:

14. “Church Finances,” Church History Topics.

15. “Church Incorporation,” Church History Topics, accessed August 4, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/church-incorporation>; see also deseretmanagement.com.

- *The Church and its leaders should only focus on spiritual issues, not finances.* This false binary presents spirituality or financial responsibility as opposites, with only one option to be pursued. In real life, financial means are required to print scriptures and hymnals, support missionary work, and build holy places of worship.
- *Church leaders should release financial data and let the facts speak for themselves.* Facts do not speak; people do. All information requires context, completeness, and interpretation. Frequently, Church financial information cannot be shared completely and publicly for reasons of protecting personal privacy, complying with legally defined restrictions, and maintaining confidentiality.¹⁶
- *If Church leaders were truly prophets, then all their financial decisions would be successful.* This assumption is not supported by any scripture or prophetic teaching, ancient or modern. By contrast, in the records of sacred history we see ample evidence that God allows his children to develop good judgment, make choices, and reap the consequences of their own actions (see 1 Ne. 3–4; 2 Ne. 2:24–29; Ether 3:1–6; Matt. 25:14–30; and D&C 27:2; 60:5; 62:4–5; 80:1–3; 107:99–100; 111:1–6).
- *Because tithing is just like taxes, we deserve a public accounting of how funds are used.* Tithing is not just like taxes. Taxes are extracted from citizens by governments to operate public initiatives and deserve public accountability. By contrast, tithing is a private response to God by a disciple who feels grateful for blessings received, wants to give back what is already God's, and places trust in future promises of heaven's help. Tithing is an offering to God, and he will hold his servants accountable for its use.
- *Wealth is a sign of righteousness.* This expectation has its roots not in scripture but in an American cultural idea known as the prosperity gospel. The idea that one's righteousness results in material wealth is wrong and creates harmful ideas about individual worth and interpersonal ministering.
- *There is a stunningly new condemnation of the Church and its leaders on social media.* Over the past two hundred years, sensationalism has routinely characterized public criticism of the Church. Sensational stories have long played on fears that the Church secretly

16. See Keith A. Erikson, *Real vs. Rumor: How to Dispel Latter-day Myths* (Deseret Book, 2021), 50–61.

controlled vast hidden resources (even while it was paying off debts!).¹⁷ Fear and conspiracy theories drive clicks and shares, but they are unhelpful for increasing understanding.

Thinking Skills. Today we are surrounded by information—good and bad, truth and lies. As we work to understand the past, we must develop the skills to evaluate information.¹⁸ Discernment is both a skill we can develop and a gift of the Spirit (D&C 46:23). President Russell M. Nelson taught that “to discern means to sift, to separate, or to distinguish.” It is “a supernal gift” that “allows members of the Church to see things not visible and to feel things not tangible.”¹⁹ With practice, we can improve our thinking skills, developing a keen eye, an analytical mind, and good judgment.²⁰ Among the thinking skills and concepts helpful for understanding the history of Church finances are the following:

- *Expand binaries.* Modern cultures frequently reduce the richness of reality to a pair of either/or opposites—good or evil, members or non-members, faith or doubt. Binaries are useful for keeping small children alive and for creating computer code, but they become harmful when they limit choices, misdirect zeal, and increase contentious polarization. We inhibit our ability to understand Church finances if we impose binaries on the discussion—the Church must deal either with sacred matters or secular; decisions must be made either by revelation or good investment advice; the Church must be either a divine organization or just a legal entity. The Savior demonstrated how to expand binaries by identifying the extremes and finding a middle point, accepting both, and adding to the to

17. For example, in 1911, an article in *Cosmopolitan Magazine* stated that the Church “overtowers either the Steel Trust or Standard Oil” and that the goal of Church leaders was to “cross the Atlantic, cross the Pacific, and rule the nations of the earth” economically. See Matthew C. Godfrey, “A Snake in the Sugar: Magazines, the Hardwick Committee, and the Utah-Idaho Sugar Company, 1910–1911,” in *Contingent Citizens: Shifting Perceptions of Latter-Day Saints in American Political Culture*, ed. Spencer W. McBride, Brent M. Rogers, and Keith A. Erekson (Cornell University Press, 2020), 148–9.

18. “Seeking Answers to Your Questions: Work to Understand the Past,” Topics and Questions, accessed August 4, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/seeking-answers/06-work-to-understand-the-past>.

19. Russell M. Nelson, “Ask, Seek, Knock,” *Liahona*, November 2009, 83.

20. See Keith A. Erekson, “Understanding Church History by Study and Faith,” *Liahona*, February 2017, 56–59; Keith A. Erekson, “How Can We Find Truth in a Sea of Information?” [digital only article], *Liahona*, April 2023, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2023/04/digital-only-young-adults/how-can-we-find-truth-in-a-sea-of-information>.

the purported opposition by offering “both-and” ideas (see John 8:3–11; Matt. 22:17–21; and D&C 21:1–2; 76:78–81). Elder Dallin H. Oaks described this improved thinking as considering “good, better, and best.”²¹ Develop the skill to perceive and expand oversimplified binaries.

- *Change your assumptions.* Assumptions are things we presuppose or take for granted without offering any evidence. They spring from our values and cultures and often cannot be proven. Assumptions serve as shortcuts to leap to a solution we already desire. We should not assume that the financial decisions of prophets will always be successful, or that imitating Church investments will lead to riches, or that tithing is the same as taxes. Frequently, challenges with Church finances could stem from incorrect assumptions and expectations. Develop the skill to question why you assume something and be humble to change when you learn better information.
- *It’s a long story.* One of the most common errors in studying Church finances in historical perspective is to oversimplify the past by romanticizing it (a simpler, safer time), omitting it (leaving out the middle), or reducing it (to a meme or slogan). It is incomplete to talk only of the Church’s founding in 1830 and its current stock portfolio without understanding the history in between that involved bankruptcy, periods of debt, a commitment to sound fiscal practices, and the removal of significant financial burdens previously placed on individuals and families. The antidote to oversimplification is to talk about the complete past as a long story. We can observe that change occurs over a long period of time, “line upon line” (2 Ne. 28:30). We can look for multiple causes of events that include many reasons, decisions, and factors relevant to multiple actors. Finally, our understanding of the past develops over many years of collective study and analysis as we wait for implications to play out and sources to be discovered.

Specific Questions about Church Finances

Understanding how all the parts of an answer fit together can prepare us to address specific questions about Church finances. We must seek out accurate information, eliminate errors, and employ good thinking skills as we deepen our discipleship, rely on the Holy Ghost, and respond

²¹ Dallin H. Oaks, “Good, Better, Best,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 104–8.

to personalized needs. The following prompts are not meant to serve as a catechism to be memorized but rather a guide to help begin your preparation. The personal element of an answer makes every question unique—we never really answer the same question twice because the asker always brings an individualized background, starting point, and motivation. You will present this material in a different way each time you answer, depending on the asker’s needs, time constraints, and guidance you receive from the Holy Ghost.

Why does a church have so much money? In modern societies, churches routinely use money for printing scripture and instructional materials, purchasing and maintaining meeting places, and carrying out missionary or community service work. Because of the doctrine of gathering—for unity, strength, and temple ordinances—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has also needed to engage in real estate acquisition, economic development, and long-term financial planning. The forms for these activities have varied over time as the directive to gather developed from physical concentration in a single place to the worldwide distribution of hundreds of temples.²²

In the twenty-first century, Church resources support four divinely appointed responsibilities that involve both spiritual needs and material means. First, the Church helps families live the gospel of Jesus Christ by providing materials that support worship and personal study, sponsoring all local unit meeting place needs and operating costs for more than thirty thousand congregations, and hosting educational and literacy efforts, including the administration of five colleges and universities and a world-wide seminary and institute program.²³

Second, the Church enables families to be united for eternity by making covenants with God in houses of the Lord which have been built since ancient times using the best materials and craftsmanship available as expressions of devotion to God.²⁴ As the number of people desiring

22. “How the Church Uses Donations and Financial Reserves,” Gospel Topics and Questions, accessed August 4, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/learn/church-donations-and-reserves>.

23. “How the Church Uses Donations”; “Church Financial Administration: Why Does the Church Support Educational Institutions?,” Topics and Questions, accessed August 4, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/church-financial-administration>.

24. “Church Financial Administration: Why Does the Church Spend So Much Money on Temples?,” Topics and Questions, accessed August 4, 2025, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/church-financial-administration?lang=eng#p_qq48a.

to make covenants has grown into the millions and their geographical distribution expanded across the earth, the construction of temples has accelerated to keep pace (Brigham Young predicted that thousands of temples will be needed).²⁵

Third, the Church invites all to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ by equalizing the individual and family contributions for thousands of missionaries, managing operating costs for hundreds of missions, and complying with regulations and relationships with governments.

Fourth, the Church follows the Savior's instructions and example to care for others by ministering to immediate welfare needs, supporting the development of individual and family provident living, managing a host of storehouses and welfare facilities, and contributing to global humanitarian causes (often working in partnership with other international aid agencies).²⁶

The scope of resources needed to support the work of the Church often goes unnoticed or underappreciated because of the sheer breadth (thousands of units all over the world) and because of its almost invisible ubiquity (sacrament cups are somehow just there every week). During the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, nobody even blinked when the Church simply secured airfare to transport nearly eighty thousand missionaries to their home countries in a time of stress, scarcity, and high costs.²⁷

Why does the Church own for-profit companies? Two misconceptions lie beneath this question. First, the idea that a nonprofit entity (like a church or other charitable organization) cannot earn a profit is incorrect. The important difference between nonprofit organizations and for-profit businesses is that a nonprofit cannot distribute its profit to the private individuals who control the organization. Any gains must go toward public benefit and the organization's defined public mission (including reasonable payment for provided labor and other services).²⁸

25. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe (Deseret Book, 1925), 604.

26. See "Church Financial Administration: How Much Does the Church Spend on Humanitarian Efforts?," Topics and Questions, accessed August 4, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/church-financial-administration>. See also Matthew 19:16–22 and Acts 6:1–6.

27. "Reassigned Missionaries Travel to New Missions," Newsroom, June 11, 2020, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/reassigned-missionaries-travel-new-missions>.

28. "Myths About Nonprofits," About America's Nonprofits, National Council of Nonprofits, accessed August 4, 2025, <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/about-americas-nonprofits/myths-about-nonprofits>; "Inurement/Private Benefit: Charitable

Second, the idea that God does not want his Church to attain financial gains contradicts the wisdom espoused in Jesus's teachings about multiplying talents (money) and following wise management principles (Matt. 7:24–27; 22:21; 25:14–30; Luke 14:28–33).²⁹

The informational part of the answer grows out of historical needs and opportunities. Some of the Church's business corporations have been in operation since the late 1800s, when geographic isolation created a need for some entity to provide important individual and community services—utilities, hospitality, financial, and insurance companies. Other businesses developed alongside the Church's mission to broadcast the gospel message to the world—businesses related to publishing, radio, and television. Since the 1960s, the Church has set aside part of its funds as a reserve for future needs. Over time, those reserve funds have been invested and managed in the form of property (real estate, development, and master planning), farmland (farms, orchards, and ranches), and cash investments (stocks and equities in the US stock market).³⁰ The Church and its for-profit affiliates follow tax laws in the countries where they operate and pay relevant taxes related to income, property, sales, and other requirements.³¹

Why does the Church spend money on [insert topic] instead of spending it on [insert another topic of personal concern]? This is a very common framework for a question, though the specific details will vary depending on the asker's interests or concerns. Sometimes the answer involves learning that the Church does indeed make contributions and investments toward the desired objective. In many cases, Church leaders have been reluctant to tout everything they do, preferring to follow the Savior's teaching to "Take heed that ye do not your

Organizations," Charitable Organizations, Exempt Organization Types, Charities and Nonprofits, Internal Revenue Service, last modified November 26, 2024, <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/inurement-private-benefit-charitable-organizations>.

29. See "Church Financial Administration: Why Does the Church Own Media and Insurance Companies?," Topics and Questions, accessed August 4, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/church-financial-administration>.

30. Property is managed by Property Reserve, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://propertyreserve.org/>; farmland is managed by Farmland Reserve, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://farmlandreserve.org/>; and stocks are managed by Ensign Peak Advisors, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://www.ensignpeak.org/>.

31. "Church Financial Administration: Do Church-Affiliated Entities Pay Taxes?," Topics and Questions, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/church-financial-administration>.

alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 6:1). However, since 2013 the Church has published an account of its humanitarian work.³²

Other times, an answer to this question involves checking the desired cause against the Church's four divinely appointed responsibilities. There are myriad good causes, but Church leaders are under obligation to the Lord (because it is his Church) and to local governments (as a legally defined and recognized entity) to carry out tasks related to its mission. Finally, sometimes part of this answer involves validating that the desired cause is good and remembering that Jesus encouraged and exemplified that his Saints go about "doing good" and "be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness" (Acts 10:38; D&C 58:27).

Do Church leaders grow rich off the tithing of its members? Throughout the world, the Church relies on members to provide voluntary leadership of local congregations and regional ecclesiastical activities. These members do not receive financial compensation from the Church and maintain their own employment to support themselves and their families. Some general Church leaders must leave their careers when called to full-time Church service. Applying principles taught by Jesus Christ in modern times, these leaders receive a modest living allowance and insurance benefits to enable their full-time attention to his work (see D&C 42:71–73; 75:24).³³ A recent review of available data by an external researcher indicated that the relative compensation figure, when adjusted for inflation, has remained basically flat since the 1870s.³⁴

32. For "Caring Summaries" since 2021, see "Explore the Caring for Those in Need Summary," How Does the Church Care for Those in Need?, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/serve/caring/annual-summary>; for 2013–2024, see collection "LDS Charities Annual Reports, 2013–2024," Welfare and Self-Reliance Services Department, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/record/7195866f-5dae-4cf0-b327-8838495bd57c/0?view=browse&>. See also Dallin H. Oaks, "Helping the Poor and Distressed," *Liahona*, November 2022, 6–8.

33. See "Church Financial Administration: Do Church Leaders Receive Financial Support?," Gospel Topics Essays, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/church-financial-administration>.

34. D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Wealth and Corporate Power* (Signature Books, 2017), 8–15. See also Rod Decker and Larry D. Curtis, "MormonLeaks Web Page Posts Documents About 'Living Allowance' of LDS General Authorities," KUTV, January 9, 2017, <https://kutv.com/news/local/mormonLeaks-web-page-posts-information-about-living-allowance-of-lds-general-authorities>.

Why isn't the Church more open about its finances; what is it hiding? This question often involves several of the following assumptions: all information should be released to the public (an oversimplification); the Church does not release any information (an all-or-nothing binary); secrecy implies wrongdoing (a conspiracy theory); and full disclosure would benefit all (assuming no harm). Underlying each of these is often an assertion that disclosure of facts will solve the problem of mistrust. But even accurate information requires interpretation and needs multiple perspectives.³⁵

We can correct the first oversimplification with a simple thought experiment. “You’re right,” you might respond, “the Church should release all the information that it has. You made a contribution to the Church, so let’s begin with your banking information.” That is typically enough to prompt the realization that there are differences of information, some to share and others to keep safe. Some of the protections around information are defined by external laws and regulations (and vary by country). Other safeguards stem from best practices for maintaining confidentiality, managing current operations, and pursuing long-term planning.³⁶ In other words, some information should be protected.

Considering the variety of international regulations and common safeguards, the Church’s financial disclosures have taken many forms throughout its history. Between 1915 and 1959, leaders announced annual summaries of income and expenditures in general conferences, identifying categories of expenses such as meetinghouses, office buildings, schools, missions, and welfare. Since that time, leaders announce a report containing the results of an annual general audit in general conference, stating that Church leaders followed financially responsible procedures. Since 2013, annual reports of Church humanitarian activities have been released each year.³⁷ In compliance with local jurisdictional requirements, the Church also discloses requested activities in

35. Erekson, *Real vs. Rumor*, 50–61.

36. For an exploration of these protections in historical records see Keith A. Erekson, “A New Era of Research Access in the Church History Library,” *Journal of Mormon History* 46, no. 4 (October 2020): 117–29.

37. For reports for 2021–present see “Explore the Caring for Those in Need Summary,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/serve/caring/annual-summary>. For previous years, see collection “LDS Charities Annual Reports, 2013–2024” (Church History Library), <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/record/7195866f-5dae-4cf0-b327-8838495bd57c/0?view=browse>.

Australia, England and Wales, and the US Stock Exchange.³⁸ Today, the Church often describes categories of expenditures and complies with legal disclosure requirements in multiple countries and contexts.

Sometimes the call for transparency insists on seeing a specific number—total wealth, total revenues, or total expenditures. Common reasons for the request might include that disclosure would prevent costly decisions or aid donors in decision-making. Among nonprofits generally, it is unclear if disclosure prevents costly decisions. In the Church's own history, during the period in which financial summaries were shared publicly in general conference, the Church reported that it was forced into deficit spending (in 1938, during the Great Depression) and lost money on municipal bonds (in 1956). As for informing donors, the Church does not invite contributions based on a claim of higher relative performance. Tithes and fast offerings are a freewill offering between the member and God.

Did a past Church leader predict a time when members would no longer pay tithing? The friendly version of this question may come from a person looking for a little extra spending cash, while a more antagonistic framing couples the idea with the charge that since tithing is still required, the past prophet was a fraud and the Church is not true. Two thinking skills are helpful here: First, we must try to trace the alleged statement to a real source, and then we must investigate the source fully.³⁹

It turns out the statement is authentic. At the April 1907 general conference, President Joseph F. Smith said: “We expect to see the day when we will not have to ask you for one dollar of donation for any purpose.” Those few words are often presented alone and are frequently accompanied online with emotionally charged headlines and graphics. But doing so lifts the statement entirely out of context. Here is the full statement:

38. Australian charity register reports (2013–present), “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Australia,” Charity Register, Australian Government; Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://www.acnc.gov.au/charity/charities/df8937d2-38af-e811-a95e-000d3ad24c60/documents/>; Great Britain charity register reports (2017–present), “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Great Britain),” Charity Commission for England and Wales, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/en/charity-search/-/charity-details/242451/accounts-and-annual-returns>; Quarterly reports to Securities and Exchange Commission (2020–present), “Ensign Peak Advisors,” U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://www.sec.gov/cgi-bin/browse-edgar?action=getcompany&CIK=0001454984&type=&dateb=&owner=include&count=40>.

39. Erikson, *Real vs. Rumor*, 145–48, 196–202.

At last we are in a position that we can pay as we go. We do not have to borrow any more, and we won't have to if the Latter-day Saints continue to live their religion and observe this law of tithing. It is the law of revenue to the Church. Furthermore, I want to say to you, we may not be able to reach it right away, but we expect to see the day when we will not have to ask you for one dollar of donation for any purpose, except that which you volunteer to give of your own accord, because we will have tithes sufficient in the storehouse of the Lord to pay everything that is needful for the advancement of the kingdom of God.⁴⁰

Now we can effectively analyze the entire statement. First, the situation matters. In 1907, President Smith was excited to announce that after eighteen years of being in debt, the Church had finally paid off the high-interest loans incurred during the 1880s and 1890s. Next, the statement does not announce the end of tithing but rather emphasizes it as “the law of revenue to the Church” with a promise of future success as we “continue to . . . observe this law of tithing.” We can also see the statement about “donations for any purpose” in context of the numerous other requirements Church members faced in 1907—to provide their own local congregational budget, build their own chapels, pay their own utilities, pay membership dues for Relief Society, and host their own fundraisers. It would be another eighty-five years before each of those donation requirements were finally eliminated by the Church’s strengthening financial position. Finally, we can determine the true significance of this statement. It is not an announcement of the end of tithing (a misreading when taken out of context), but it does prophesy of a day when tithing and freewill contributions would be sufficient and all other donation requirements would cease. That prophesy was fulfilled in the 1990s.

A Case Study in Seeking Answers: The SEC Fine

The usefulness of this model for answering questions can be illustrated with a case study. Let’s imagine that your brother-in-law asks you to explain why The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was fined in 2023 for its financial activities. He has seen references on social media that are mostly condemnatory, and he wonders what really happened and what it all means.

40. Joseph F. Smith, “Opening Address,” *Seventy-Seventh Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1907), 7.

If a complete answer is comprised of six parts—discipleship, personal, the Holy Ghost, accurate information, elimination of errors, and thinking skills—then a related need is how to pursue and assemble all six pieces. In practical terms the following steps provide a general routine for arriving at the best answers: (1) Identify the best sources, (2) Read the best sources closely, (3) Lay aside distracting errors, (4) Consider how to understand the information, and (5) Prepare to help others understand. These steps guide toward answering: What did the Church do? Why is it paying a penalty? What does this mean?

1. Identify the best sources. The process begins with a quest for sources—our modern application of the scriptural injunction to study the “best books” (D&C 88:118; 90:15; 109:14). Identifying the best sources requires us to imagine, search, and evaluate. First, we imagine: what are we trying to discover or prove? What information is needed to understand the issues? What search terms and key words might lead to that information? We should consider the types of sources that will have the desired information—big sets of data, personal experiences, contrasting opinions on a divisive issue, the expert analysis of a scholar. With this general sense of what we want and where it might be, we are prepared to search and locate specific sources. Are there large collections of specific records? Which government agencies host websites that house the data? Has a pollster or researcher collected stories? Has a commentator summarized data on a podcast or blog? Have think tanks or research groups analyzed the issue? The search terms and key words you identified may need to be modified as you go. As you find potential sources, you must evaluate how helpful they will be. Typically, it is most helpful to define criteria by which to test the information you encounter, such as accuracy, authenticity, reliability, fairness, and comprehensiveness.⁴¹

These skills of imagining, searching, and evaluating help us identify the best sources about the fine the Church paid in 2023. First, we will imagine the information we seek: Who fined the Church in 2023? Did they give any reasons for the fine? Did the Church officially comment on the issue? Effective search terms will include the Church’s name, the agency that levied the fine, and a responsible Church unit. In this case, we can quickly discover that the fine was levied by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) of the United States Government against both the Church and its financial investment group, Ensign Peak Advisors (EPA).

41. The use of these five criteria are developed in Erikson, “How Can We Find Truth in a Sea of Information?”

So then we can search more specifically: Does the SEC publish information about the fines that it levies? Is there an archive of past announcements by any of the three entities? As we evaluate the information we find, we are less interested at this stage in the musings and commentaries by journalists, bloggers, or social media influencers. We seek sources directly from the parties involved in the fine, and we discover that both the SEC and the Church host online repositories of past public statements. The SEC published a press release and a detailed report, and the Church released a formal response.⁴² Because these three documents were created by the parties involved (authenticity), describe their positions (accuracy, reliability), provide insight about their interactions (fairness), and describe the issues in detail (comprehensiveness), these three documents are the best sources on this topic.⁴³

2. Read the best sources closely. Having identified the best sources—a press release, a report by the SEC, and a response by the Church—we now need to read them closely. Close reading strategies seek comprehension: What is being said? How do the parts fit with the whole? How would you summarize? What can you infer? What should we clarify? These kinds of questions help us understand what happened (and prepare us for later questions about what it might mean).

In this case of the 2023 fine by the SEC, all three documents (and especially the detailed nine-page summary) explain what we know about the parties involved, the money at stake, the charges announced, the problems they address, and how they were discovered.

42. “SEC Charges The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and Its Investment Management Company for Disclosure Failures and Misstated Filings,” Press Release, Newsroom, US Securities and Exchange Commission, February 21, 2023, <https://www.sec.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2023-35>; U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, “Order Instituting Cease-and-Desist Proceedings . . . in the Matter of Ensign Peak Advisors, Inc., and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Respondents. Release No. 96951,” February 21, 2023, <https://www.sec.gov/files/litigation/admin/2023/34-96951.pdf>; “Church Issues Statement on SEC Settlement,” Newsroom, February 21, 2023, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/church-issues-statement-on-sec-settlement>. It should be noted that the SEC prohibits defendants (the Church in this case) from publicly sharing additional information; see Eleanor Gilroy and Christina Zaroulis Milnor, “Time’s Up for the SEC’s ‘Gag Rule’? Predictions on Its Potential Demise,” Cranfill Sumner, December 10, 2024, <https://www.cshlaw.com/resources/times-up-for-the-secs-gag-rule-predictions-on-its-potential-demise/>.

43. For a video tutorial of this step in a business research and communication setting, see Keith A. Erikson, “How Should I Search?,” MCOM 320 virtual lecture on information literacy (BYU Online Recording Studio, 2023), <https://byu.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=86d54e49-f036-4eeb-858d-b07e010ed154>.

- *About the Parties:* The US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) was created after the Stock Market Crash of 1929 as an independent regulatory agency to enforce laws that protect the public and investors against manipulation of the US stock market.⁴⁴ Ensign Peak Advisors, Inc. (EPA) was established in 1997 to manage the Church's long-term investments, which originate from annual surpluses, investment income, and assets of other Church entities. EPA is a nonprofit charitable organization that solely advises another charitable organization (the Church), so it is exempt from federal corporate income taxes but still subject to other taxes, such as property, payroll, and so forth.
- *About the Money:* Within the EPA reserve is a portfolio of publicly traded stocks that grew during the period in question from approximately \$7 billion in 1997 to \$32 billion in 2018. (In 2024, the portfolio held almost \$56.9 billion.) Holdings of more than \$100 million in publicly traded securities are required to be disclosed to the SEC and the public because they are large enough to play a "significant role in the securities markets as an institutional investment manager."⁴⁵
- *About the Charges:* The SEC announced four interrelated charges. First, EPA failed to file disclosure reports (known as Form 13F) about equity investments from 1997–2019. Second, EPA filed misstated forms in 2001, 2005, 2011, and 2015 that obscured the size of the Church's portfolio by dividing its holdings among an eventual thirteen limited liability companies (LLCs) organized in multiple locations. Third, after dividing its holdings, EPA retained control over the investment decisions of the thirteen individual LLCs. Fourth, EPA filed misstated forms on behalf of the LLCs. The avoidance of disclosure and misstatement of facts were undertaken with the knowledge of the First Presidency and Presiding Bishopric. The Church Audit Department highlighted the risk of this strategy in two audits in 2014 and 2017 but did not recommend changes. As penalty, EPA agreed to pay \$4 million, and the Church agreed to pay \$1 million.⁴⁶

44. "Mission," US Securities and Exchange Commission, last reviewed or updated August 9, 2023, <https://www.sec.gov/about/mission>.

45. SEC, "Release No. 96951," 2–3, 7.

46. SEC, "Release No. 96951," 2, 4, 7–8.

- *About the Problems:* As described by the SEC, dividing assets is acceptable so long as the smaller entities (a) control the assets and (b) file their own forms, but in this case, EPA retained control and filed for all thirteen LLCs. The SEC press release concluded: “We allege that the LDS Church’s investment manager, with the Church’s knowledge, went to great lengths to avoid disclosing the Church’s investments, depriving the Commission and the investing public of accurate market information.”⁴⁷
- *How the Problems were Discovered:* “In May 2018, a public website reported” the existence of separate entities with domain names registered to the Church’s Intellectual Reserve, Inc. Each of the entities (the thirteen LLCs identified above) “listed a Business Manager whose name matched that of a Church employee.” The SEC began investigating and expressed its concern to EPA in June 2019. In February 2020, EPA complied by filing its first consolidated Form 13F representing holdings from the last quarter of 2019.⁴⁸
- *About the Motives:* The SEC order observed that Church leaders “sought to avoid disclosure of the amount and nature of its assets”⁴⁹ due to concern that disclosure “would lead to negative consequences in light of the size of the Church’s portfolio”⁵⁰ and “attract unwanted attention.”⁵¹ The statement does not describe the nature of the anticipated consequences or attention. The Church statement attributed the decision to “legal counsel regarding how to comply with its reporting obligations while attempting to maintain the privacy of the portfolio” and twice states that EPA and Church leaders “regret mistakes made.”⁵² Though the SEC still levied a fine, the public statements of both parties describe the Church’s motive

47. “SEC Charges The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and Its Investment Management Company for Disclosure Failures and Misstated Filings,” Press Release.

48. “Church Issues Statement on SEC Settlement,” Newsroom, February 21, 2023; SEC, “Release No. 96951,” 7. EPA continues to file quarterly forms as required. Current and past forms (2020–present) are archived at “Ensign Peak Advisors,” US Securities and Exchange Commission, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://www.sec.gov/cgi-bin/browse-edgar?action=getcompany&CIK=0001454984&type=&dateb=&owner=include&count=40>.

49. SEC, “Release No. 96951,” 2.

50. SEC, “Release No. 96951,” 3.

51. SEC, “Release No. 96951,” 4.

52. “Church Issues Statement on SEC Settlement.”

as pursuing “privacy” while avoiding “negative consequences” and “unwanted attention.”⁵³

3. Lay aside distracting errors. Having read the best sources closely, we are now armed with accurate and comprehensive information that will help us quickly eliminate errors, especially the errors that appear in traditional and social media reporting that can still be found by a quick internet search. As is typical in our polarized information age, two groups of errors quickly emerged as opposites. At one extreme, some gleefully recited the charges as proof that a corrupt church led by greedy businessmen got caught hiding money, avoiding taxes, laundering money, misusing funds, manipulating the market, and other nefarious malpractices. The single common origin for each of these allegations is ignorance about the role of the SEC. As the regulatory body overseeing participation in the US stock market, the SEC has absolutely nothing to do with taxes or money laundering, and it made no claims of misuse or manipulation. The SEC report demonstrates that all funds were accounted for and reported (though improperly divided up with control obscured).

At the other extreme, some well-meaning defenders were just as egregious in their use of errors to protect the Church, claiming that the Church hadn’t done anything wrong (but the Church statement accepted the charges and penalty), or that it was just a simple mistake (it was multiple decisions over many years), or that SEC law was too complicated to follow (other entities follow it). Thus, the binary framing of nothing to see here vs. all manner of evils proved to be a total distraction from the actual issues found in the best sources.

A few other errors also surfaced: Some alleged that tithing money would be used to pay the penalty, but the Church statement announced that it would use only investment returns. Some said the issues came to light because of a whistleblower in late 2019, but we know that notification had occurred earlier in May 2018.

4. Consider how to understand the information. At this point in our search, we have a lot of accurate information—about the parties, charges, and problems—and we have eliminated the distracting errors. As we continue thinking, a few significant considerations can distill upon our minds. First, it is important to note that the Church and the

53. “Church Issues Statement on SEC Settlement”; SEC, “Release No. 96951,” 3–4.

SEC came to a resolution. This is not a “Church vs. government” story because the Church statement accepted all the charges in the SEC order: EPA failed to disclose its total holdings in one form, EPA obscured the size and administration of Church holdings by filing through multiple LLCs, and the First Presidency and Presiding Bishopric were aware of EPA actions. Likewise, the SEC order acknowledged that the Church ceased the misstated filings in February 2020 and has complied since then.⁵⁴

Second, we should also note that some information remains unknown publicly. The Church has not released information about the legal counsel it received (for example, goals and assessment of risk), nor has it commented on what the perceived negative consequences of disclosure might have been. The SEC likewise offered no comment, nor was a public comment required by law or regulation. This silence creates the gap of motive that was filled in by public discussion because humans typically dislike missing pieces of understanding. We should be careful not to fill in the gaps on this or any other topic. When we don’t know something, the best answer is always to state simply that we don’t know it (see Moses 5:6; 1 Ne. 11:17; and Alma 7:8).

Finally, having a command of the available information and the errors reveals that media outlets reported the case very differently. Some reports stuck closely to the stock market issues identified in the SEC order and the Church’s response.⁵⁵ Others leaped from this story to other stories about taxes or money laundering and made allegations

54. SEC, “Release No. 96951,” 2, 7.

55. See Kim Bojórquez and Erin Alberty, “Mormonism Experts Predict Varied Reactions After SEC Settlement,” Axios, February 23, 2023, <https://wwwaxios.com/local/salt-lake-city/2023/02/22/mormon-latter-day-saint-church-utah-sec> [note: this article has been abbreviated since 2023]; “Mormonen müssen Geldstrafe an US-Börsenaufsicht zahlen,” Spiegel, February 22, 2023, <https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/utah-mormonen-muessen-millionen-geldstrafe-an-us-boersenaufsicht-zahlen-a-038a9838-ef38-41a1-a76d-e9d6036ead90>; Tad Walch, “Church Settles Case with SEC over Financial Reporting,” Deseret News, February 21, 2023, <https://www.deseret.com/u-s-world/2023/2/21/23602967/church-settles-case-with-sec-over-financial-reporting/>; Jeff Tavss, “LDS Church, Investment Fund Charged with Disclosure Failures, Misstated Filings,” Fox 13, February 21, 2023, <https://www.fox13now.com/news/local-news/lds-church-investment-fund-charged-with-disclosure-failures-misstated-filings>; Pedro Curvelo, “Igreja mórmon paga 5 milhões de dólares à SEC por falta de transparéncia,” Negócios, February 21, 2023, <https://www.jornaldenegocios.pt/mercados/detalhe/igreja-mormon-paga-5-milhoes-de-dolares-a-sec-por-falta-de-transparencia>; Rob Wile, “Feds Fine Mormon Church for Illicitly Hiding \$32 Billion Investment Fund Behind Shell

about motives or moral failings.⁵⁶ By comparing the information in the official reports to the varying treatments in the media, we can observe the commitment of various media outlets to accuracy, reliability, fairness, and comprehensiveness, thereby helping us evaluate the media as reliable sources.

5. Prepare to help others. Our case study began with an imagined query of a brother-in-law and our report back to him will be framed by helping him receive all elements of a complete answer. As you listen and discuss, pay attention to him and what he has learned so far. What does he think happened? What sources has he studied? What personal information do we know about him that is relevant to this topic: How much does he understand about investments and the SEC? Is he suspicious of large organizations generally? Does his current consumption of traditional and social media involve either/or worldviews, partisan reporting, or conspiracy theories? Is there something else relevant from his personal life experience? Your understanding of his personal preparation will help you know which errors to call out quickly, how to share information about the specifics in this case, or if he needs more general information about why the Church needs and uses its reserves and investments. You may need to introduce some thinking skills to expand binaries, change assumptions, or assimilate all the details in a long story.

You will want to connect the information and skills with our discipleship—we follow a Savior who established a Church and taught from the wisdom of following sound management principles (including compliance with regulations). He also taught us to act with integrity, acknowledge mistakes, and make amends. During the past two hundred years, the Lord has directed his servants in both ecclesiastical and temporal matters. They (and we) learn to recognize and rely on the Holy Ghost through a process of revelation in which God often gives brief or partial instructions while allowing space for human judgment, error, and growth.

Companies,” NBC News, February 21, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/mormon-church-multibillion-investment-fund-sec-settlement-rcna71603>.

56. David Noyce and Peggy Fletcher Stack, “LDS Church to Pay \$5M for Hiding Stock Holdings, Needs to ‘Rebuild Trust,’ ” *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 23, 2023, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2023/02/21/lds-church-investment-firm-agree/>; Hugo Stamm, “Finanzskandal erschüttert die Mormonenkirche: 5 Millionen Dollar Busse,” Watson, February 25, 2023, <https://www.watson.ch/blogs/sektentblog/482732626-finanzskandal-erschuettert-die-mormonenkirche-5-millionen-dollar-busse>.

Following this process for seeking answers pays many dividends. It can help make sense of the SEC charges and prepare to answer a family member's question. It can also help prepare to respond to additional questions. For example, the SEC fine was commonly linked in media coverage to a different whistleblower case in which a former employee of EPA named David Nielsen alleged that EPA had a \$100 billion portfolio and violated its tax-exempt status by using investment revenue in for-profit businesses, specifically for insurance and the City Creek mall in Salt Lake City. The two cases are both about EPA but the contrast in details is telling. In the case of the SEC, when a possible problem was identified in May 2018, the SEC investigated, contacted the Church in June 2019, and the problem was resolved by correct reporting for the fourth financial quarter of 2019 and payment of a fine. By contrast, the whistleblower case went to the appropriate tax authorities in December 2019, and no action was taken by the Internal Revenue Service (who is responsible for tax compliance). In January 2023, Nielsen then took the issue to the US Senate Finance Committee, who likewise did not act.⁵⁷ Next, Nielsen took the issue to the investigative journalism show *60 Minutes*, which ran an episode in May 2023.⁵⁸ In this case, the absence of response by the IRS and the Senate is revealing as Nielsen moves from audience to audience. The Church never commented on the large, round number for its investments (\$100 billion), but in the same quarter that Nielsen made his headline-grabbing allegation, the EPA properly filed its Form 13F with the SEC listing almost \$37.9 billion. After the *60 Minutes* episode, the Church did respond to media inquiries by noting it was “unfortunate ‘60 Minutes’ sought to elevate a story based on unfounded allegations.”⁵⁹

57. “LDS Church \$100 Billion Whistleblower Asks US Senate for ‘Oversight,’” Fox 13, February 9, 2023, <https://www.fox13now.com/news/fox-13-investigates/lds-church-100-billion-whistleblower-asks-u-s-senate-for-oversight>.

58. “Whistleblower David Nielsen Speaks Out After Reporting the Mormon Church to IRS in 2019,” CBS News, May 14, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/whistleblower-david-nielsen-speaks-out-after-reporting-mormon-church-to-irs-in-2019-60-minutes-2023-05-14/>.

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Be Ready to Answer

Among the teachings attributed to Peter in the early days of Christianity is the charge for believers to “be ready always to give an answer to every[one] that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). During the latter days, the ongoing Restoration of the gospel has prompted questions, criticism, and attacks—including about the topic of Church finances. Believers have responded by preparing themselves to answer with accurate information, clear thinking, steadfast faith, and the guidance of the Holy Ghost. This article’s model, background information, prompts, and case study provide an opportunity to prayerfully study, practice, and reflect—to be ready to answer the questions that arise in the twenty-first century.

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Appendix A: Resource List

The lists below provide important starting points for understanding Church finances. The “Resources to Share” speak to more general topics and are translated into multiple languages, whereas the “Additional Resources” speak to more specific topics and may not be translated.

Resources to Share

Overviews and/or Brief Descriptions of Broader Topics

- “Church Financial Administration,” Church and Gospel Questions, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/church-financial-administration>.
- “How the Church Uses Donations and Financial Reserves,” Gospel Topics and Questions, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/learn/church-donations-and-reserves>.
- “Church Finances,” Church History Topics, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/church-finances>.
- “Church Incorporation,” Church History Topics, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/church-incorporation>.
- Gordon B. Hinckley, “The State of the Church,” *Ensign*, May 1991, 51–54, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1991/05/the-state-of-the-church>.

Explications of Relevant Financial Principles by Church Leaders

- Gérald Caussé, “The Spiritual Foundations of Church Financial Self-Reliance,” *Ensign*, July 2018, 46–51, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2018/07/the-spiritual-foundations-of-church-financial-self-reliance>.
- Dallin H. Oaks, “Helping the Poor and Distressed,” *Liahona*, November 2022, 6–8, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2022/11/18oaks>.

Additional Resources

Longer Treatments of General Financial Topics

- Gérald Caussé, “In the Lord’s Way: The Spiritual Foundations of Church Financial Self-Reliance,” in *Business and Religion: The Intersection of Faith and Finance*, ed. Matthew C. Godfrey and Michael Hubbard MacKay (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Deseret Book, 2019), 3–19, <https://rsc.byu.edu/business-religion/lords-way>. This is the complete address from which the July 2018 *Ensign* article above was excerpted.
- “Church Finances and a Growing Global Faith,” Newsroom, May 22, 2018, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/church-finances-and-a-growing-global-church>.
- Tad Walch, “Church Finances: Presiding Bishopric Offers Unique Look inside Financial Operations of Growing Faith,” *Deseret News*, February 14, 2020, <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2020/2/14/21133740/mormon-church-finances-billions-presiding-bishopric-ensign-peak-tithing-donations-byu-real-estate/>.
- Rodney H. Brady, “Business: Church Participation in Business,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (Macmillan, 1992), 1:240–43, https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Business#Church_Participation_in_Business.

Descriptions of Specific Topics

- “Consecration and Stewardship,” Church History Topics, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/consecration-and-stewardship>.
- “Tithing,” Church History Topics, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/tithing>.
- David W. Smith, “[The Development of the Council on the Disposition of the Tithes](#),” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (2018): 131–55.
- “United Firm (‘United Order’),” Church History Topics, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/united-firm-united-order>.
- Matthew C. Godfrey, “Newel K. Whitney and the United Firm,” in *Revelations in Context: The Stories Behind the Sections of the Doctrine and Covenants*, ed. Matthew McBride and James Goldberg

(The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2016), 142–47, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/revelations-in-context/newel-k-whitney-and-the-united-firm>.

- “Kirtland Safety Society” Church History Topics, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/kirtland-safety-society>.
- “Cooperative Movement,” Church History Topics, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/cooperative-movement>.
- “United Orders,” Church History Topics, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/united-orders>.
- “American Legal and Political Institutions,” Church History Topics, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/american-legal-and-political-institutions>.
- “Antipolygamy Legislation,” Church History Topics, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/anti-polygamy-legislation>.
- “Church Academies,” Church History Topics, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/church-academies>.
- “Church Universities,” Church History Topics, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/church-universities>.
- “Broadcast Media,” Church History Topics, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/broadcast-media>.
- “Great Depression,” Church History Topics, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/great-depression>.
- “Welfare Program,” Church History Topics, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/welfare-programs>.
- “Building Program,” Church History Topics, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/building-program>.

- “Temple Building,” Church History Topics, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/temple-building>.
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- “Minutes of Meeting Held in Nauvoo,” 6–7 [image 7–8] (August 8, 1844), holograph, Historian’s Office General Church Minutes, 1839–1877, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/9cle38f0-dbd2-40e3-8e65-d158de57755a/0/6>.

Appendix B: Addressing Church Finances in Church Curriculum

The lists below identify opportunities to add discussion of Church finances to relevant places in existing curriculum materials.

Doctrine and Covenants

- Section 42—A teacher might differentiate between the law of consecration (still lived today), the United Order (a firm active in the 1830s), and United Orders (co-ops created in the 1870s).⁶⁰
- Section 78, 82, 104—A teacher can accurately describe the United Order (a firm active in the 1830s).
- Section 118—The Lord instructs to care for the families of the Twelve.
- Section 119, 120—The law of tithing and the Council on the Disposition of Tithes.

New Testament

- Matthew 25:14–30—The parable of talents (a coin) draws on the wisdom of earning a return on investment, including from interest.
- Matthew 22:21—Jesus teaches to comply with tax requirements.
- Luke 14:28–33—Jesus draws on the wisdom of considering full project costs before building a tower.

Book of Mormon

- Alma 11—Introduce the Nephite money system and explain that doing God’s work requires financial means. Note the difference between helpful uses (earning wages, paying debts) and less helpful uses (stirring up lawsuits, bribing speakers).

The Eternal Family (Religion 200)

- Lesson 18—Briefly review the Church’s financial history since the 1950s to observe that Church leaders follow the same principles recommended to members (follow a budget, get out of debt, save a surplus, use the surplus for important work).

⁶⁰ “Consecration and Stewardship”; “United Firm (‘United Order’); “United Orders,” Church History Topics.

Foundations of the Restoration (Religion 225)

- Lesson 5—Note that the printing and publication of the Book of Mormon required significant financial means, including the personal sacrifice of Martin Harris.⁶¹
- Lesson 8—Teach that Jesus established and leads an organization.
- Lesson 11—Observe that the work of gathering Israel requires spiritual and temporal resources.
- Lessons 12—Observe that the establishment of Zion will require financial means to meet divine objectives, including the elimination of poverty.
- Lesson 13—Note that among the laws of God are instructions about consecration of time, talents, and financial means.
- Lessons 16, 19, 20—Observe that extending ordinances and covenants to the entire earth involves extensive temple building using financial resources.⁶²

Jesus Christ and His Everlasting Gospel (Religion 250)

- Lesson 11—Teach that Jesus established and leads an organization.
- Lesson 12—Note that among the pure truths taught by the Savior are instructions about managing resources.
- Lesson 22—Observe that the work of the ongoing Restoration requires spiritual and temporal resources.⁶³

Teachings and Doctrine of the Book of Mormon (Religion 275)

- Lesson 13—Observe that the work of gathering Israel requires spiritual and temporal resources.
- Lesson 17—Teach that Jesus established and leads an organization.

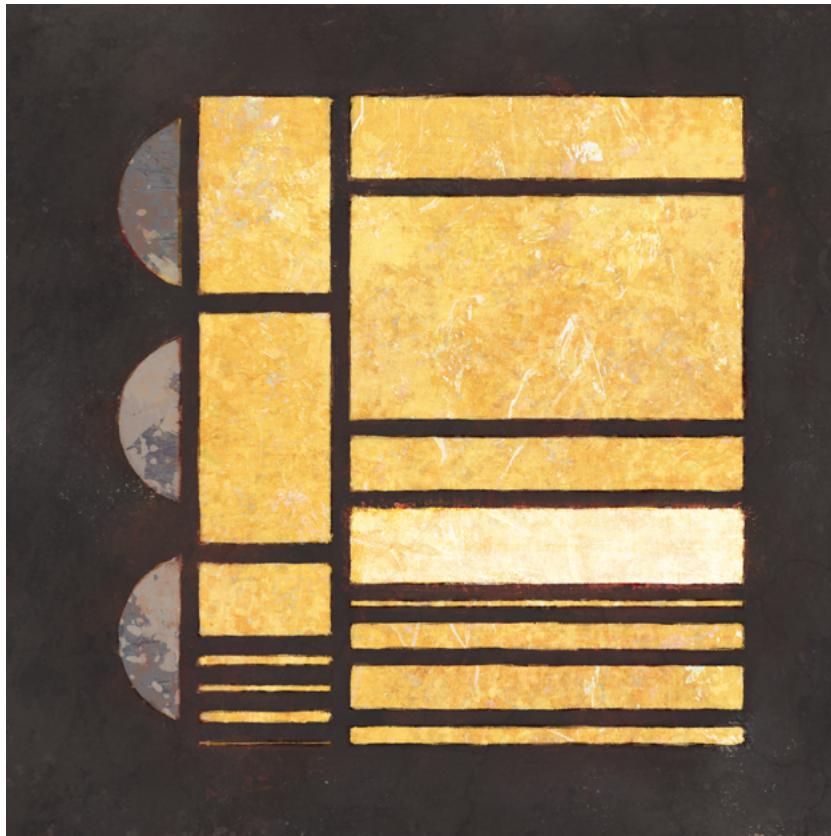
Answering My Gospel Questions (Religion 280)

- Be prepared to address questions about Church finances.

61. “Printing and Publishing the Book of Mormon,” Church History Topics, accessed August 6, 2025, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/printing-and-publishing-the-book-of-mormon>.

62. *Foundations of the Restoration Teacher Material*, (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2020), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual-foundations-of-the-restoration-teacher-material-2019>.

63. *Jesus Christ and His Everlasting Gospel Teacher Material* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2023), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/jesus-christ-and-his-everlasting-gospel-teacher-material-2023>.



By the Gift and Power of God, Ben Crowder, 2024, made with Figma, Procreate, and Affinity Photo. The rectangles in the left column represent the books written on the small plates of Nephi. The rectangles in the right column represent those on the large plates. Courtesy Ben Crowder.

Were Nephi's Small Plates Contained in Mormon's Gold Plates?

Donald Patrick Bradley Sr.

Our present Book of Mormon text was translated from records known to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the plates of Mormon and the small plates of Nephi. Joseph Smith translated Mormon's plates first and (after the first part of this translation was stolen¹) later translated Nephi's small plates. To fill the gap at the beginning of Mormon's narrative, Joseph substituted the small plates of Nephi's account for the missing part of Mormon's account. Given that Joseph Smith described this substitution in the original preface to the 1830 Book of Mormon, Latter-day Saints have always known that the Book of Mormon's extant text comes from the translation of both Mormon's plates and Nephi's small plates.² In this article, I will posit the possibility that we have not, however, visualized the relationship of those two sets of plates correctly.

Thank you so much to my dear sons Donnie and Nicholas Bradley for supporting and inspiring this work and for the love they have given across their lives. I also wish to acknowledge Jack Welch, John Thompson, Alex Criddle, and Jonathan Neville for their suggestions on this paper.

1. "History, Circa Summer 1832," in *Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844*, ed. Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2012), 15–16, 16n61; and "Preface to Book of Mormon, circa August 1829," in *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*, ed. Michael Hubbard MacKay, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2013), 92–94.

2. Book of Mormon, 1830 edition, "Preface to the Reader," iii–iv.



FIGURE 1. *By the Gift and Power of God*, Anthony Sweat, 2014, oil on board. Courtesy Anthony Sweat.

relationship of Mormon's plates and Nephi's small plates as two segments of a single record, bound together into one book by a shared set of rings. I will argue in this article that this visualization may also be faulty—that Mormon's plates and Nephi's small plates were not bound

Accurately visualizing what we know from the historical record can be surprisingly difficult. Early historical sources describe Joseph Smith translating the Book of Mormon text via interpreters or a seer stone.³ But artistic depictions, and therefore common Latter-day Saint visualizations, have often portrayed Joseph translating by simply reading from the plates with the naked eye—not using a sacred seeing implement (fig. 1). Scholarship offers a corrective to this faulty visualization.⁴

Latter-day Saints have generally visualized the

3. See "Seer Stone," Glossary, The Joseph Smith Papers, Church Historian's Press, accessed July 21, 2025, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/topic/seer-stone>; "History, 1834–1836," in Davidson and others, eds., *Histories, Volume 1*, 41; and "Volume 1 Introduction: Joseph Smith Documents Dating Through June 1831," in MacKay and others, eds., *Documents, Volume 1*, xxix–xxxii; See also Mosiah 8:13; 28:13; and Ether 4:5.

4. Joseph wrote, "Through the medium of the Urim and Thummim I translated the record by the gift, and power of God." "Church History," 1 March 1842, in Davidson and others, eds., *Histories, Volume 1*, 495; "Volume 1 Introduction," xxix–xxx, xxxn27; See Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Deseret Book, 2015), 119–30; Anthony Sweat, "By the Gift and Power of Art," in MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 229–43; and Stan Spencer, "What Did the Interpreters (Urim and Thummim) Look Like?," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 33 (2019): 223–56, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/what-did-the-interpreters-urim-and-thummim-look-like/>.

together into a single book but were utilized separately and sequentially by the Prophet Joseph Smith in translating the Book of Mormon. Evidence pointing to the model that the small plates and Mormon's plates were separate records may be found in the Book of Mormon text and in sources from the early history of the Church.⁵

Although Mormon's description in the Words of Mormon has been read to say that the two sets of plates were bound together, no text actually says this—and, as we will see further below, Mormon in fact indicates the opposite. Mormon wrote, “I shall take these plates, . . . and put them with the remainder of my record” (W of M 1:6). This verse is generally interpreted to mean that the two sets of plates were bound together. I will show that the verse more naturally implies that the two sets remained separate. Further, the title page of the Book of Mormon (and thus of Mormon's completed set of plates) describes a record lacking the small plates of Nephi, further implying that the two plate sets were separate.

In addition, the timeline of the Book of Mormon's translation and the associated exchanges of plates between Joseph Smith and the angel Moroni similarly suggest that Joseph used two distinct sets of plates in succession to translate the Book of Mormon. I will argue from historical sources that when Joseph completed his work with Mormon's set of plates at the end of May 1829, Joseph returned Mormon's plates to the angel before leaving Harmony, Pennsylvania. Joseph's remaining translation work, carried out in Fayette, New York, was exclusively from Nephi's small plates, with no need for him to further access the plates of Mormon that he had returned to the angel. This article will argue that the model of two separate sets of plates best accounts for both the textual and the historical data.

The Small Plates of Nephi are Absent from the Book of Mormon Title Page

Readers of the Nephite record are told on its title page what they are about to encounter: Mormon's abridgment of Nephi's large plates—“The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon upon Plates

5. I am grateful for dialogue with Jonathan Neville on the evidence presented here from Mormon's plates. See his *Whatever Happened to the Golden Plates?*, updated ed. (Digital Legend, 2023), Kindle ed. For a positive appraisal of Neville's perspective, see Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith's Gold Plates: A Cultural History* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 172–73.

Taken from the Plates of Nephi”—followed by Moroni’s “abridgment taken from the Book of Ether” (Title Page of the Book of Mormon).⁶ But, skipping the modern front matter, readers plunge immediately from the title page’s introduction of Mormon’s record into “The First Book of Nephi,” narrated in the voice of Nephi (“I, Nephi,” 1 Ne. 1:1) and written by him on his “small plates” (Jacob 1:1). The reader must wait until 145 pages into the modern English edition to encounter the promised abridgment from Mormon, at the book of Mosiah.

Although the reader plunges from the title page into the 145 pages of Nephi’s small plates, the title page makes no mention of the small plates.⁷ Why would Moroni, who composed or completed the title page,⁸ fail to mention Nephi’s record of the small plates if he had included it with his ringed book of plates? How should readers understand a title page announcing Mormon’s record but followed instead by Nephi’s? One might wonder if this discontinuity is explained by the fact that the manuscript translation of the first four-and-a-half centuries of Mormon’s narrative (the lost 116 pages) was stolen, and Joseph Smith replaced it with Nephi’s small plates.⁹ The lost pages do account for why Joseph

6. “Title Page of the Book of Mormon, circa Early June 1829,” in MacKay and others, eds., *Documents, Volume 1*, 63–65.

7. While “plates of Nephi” are mentioned on the title page, this refers to Nephi’s large plates, rather than the small plates—as shown by how these plates are described. The title page begins, “The Book of Mormon: an account written by the hand of Mormon upon plates taken from the plates of Nephi. Wherefore, it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi.” Notably, this does not say that the plates of Nephi were spliced into Mormon’s plates; but, rather, that Mormon’s plates were “taken from” the plates of Nephi. The title page provides the context for what this means. It reasons that Mormon’s record being “taken from” the plates of Nephi makes it “an abridgment,” dovetailing with other texts that describe Mormon’s record as an abridgment from the large plates of Nephi (for example, W of M 1:3). Indeed, Mormon elsewhere uses the title page’s precise language to describe his process of abridging the large plates—“And now I, Mormon, proceed to finish out my record, which I *take from the plates of Nephi*” (W of M 1:9, emphasis added; compare v. 5)—implying that the “plates of Nephi” from which Mormon’s record was “taken” are the large plates. Another indication that the title page’s reference to the “plates of Nephi” does not describe the small plates is its identification of the record as “an account written by the hand of Mormon,” unlike the small plates of Nephi written by Nephi, Jacob, and others.

8. For Moroni as the author of all or part of the title page, see Sidney B. Sperry, “Moroni the Lonely: The Story of the Writing of the Title Page to the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4, no. 1 (1995): 255–59; and David B. Honey, “The Secular as Sacred: The Historiography of the Title Page,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 1 (1994): 94–103.

9. Mormon’s abridged material covers up through King Benjamin (W of M 1:3), so it would have covered from 600 BC to around 130 BC, a historical span of about 470 years.

Smith later turned to Nephi's small plates as a replacement, but they do not explain why Moroni omitted any mention of Nephi's small plates on his title page, if they were in fact in his record.¹⁰

Although the title page fails to mention Nephi's small plates, it does introduce the book of Ether, which was contained in Moroni's ringed set of plates. Moroni's mention of the book of Ether on the title page implies that the title page was intended to include the principal source divisions within the bound plates set he curated. So, given that the book of Ether comprises just under six percent of the published Book of Mormon text, Moroni's omission from the title page of the much more substantial small plates of Nephi—comprising almost twenty-seven percent of the extant text—calls out for explanation.¹¹

Why, then, does Moroni omit Nephi's small plates in his introduction to the stack of plates he hid in the Hill Cumorah?¹² The answer proposed here, based on several converging lines of evidence, is that the small plates were not in that stack. Despite common opinion that the small plates were bound together with the plates of Mormon, I suggest that evidence in the Book of Mormon text and in historical sources points to another model: These sets of plates were kept separate by their Nephite authors and remained separate when used by Joseph Smith.

Regarding the lost manuscript, see Don Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages: Reconstructing the Book of Mormon's Missing Stories* (Greg Kofford Books, 2019).

10. One might propose that Moroni attached the small plates to Mormon's record only after composing the title page, but this view is problematic. The only source that can be read as suggesting the two sets of plates were bound together attributes the act to Mormon, not Moroni, and places it before Moroni received either set of plates (W of M 1:6). Also, Moroni reveals in Moroni 1:1 that he considered the record complete after adding the book of Ether—"Now I, Moroni, after having made an end of abridging the account of the people of Jared, I had supposed not to have written more"—so a title page mentioning the book of Ether should reflect his complete intended work. If it is nevertheless supposed that Moroni added the small plates after the book of Ether, then he could have also added mention of these plates on the title page, leaving the problem of his omission of the small plates from the title page still unresolved.

11. Based on the 2013 English edition of the Book of Mormon and adjusting for the commentary from Moroni, the book of Ether comprises about 30 pages, which is approximately 5.65 percent (30 pages divided by 531 pages). The small plates of Nephi (1 Nephi–Omni, 143 pages) comprise 26.9 percent. Similar ratios can be calculated using digital word counts.

12. I use the term "Hill Cumorah" here as the traditional designation for the hill where Joseph Smith found the plates. How this hill relates to the hill called Cumorah in the Book of Mormon text is an open question to be addressed by other authors. See, for instance, Andrew H. Hedges, "Book of Mormon Geographies," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2021): 196–200.

“Put Them With”: Evidence from the Text

It has been conventionally assumed that Mormon added Nephi’s small plates to his own plates by binding the two sets of plates together with the same rings to form a single stack of golden plates, and that Joseph Smith translated the entire extant Book of Mormon from this single bound volume that he obtained from the Hill Cumorah in 1827.¹³ This assumption rests on one verse: “I shall take these plates, which contain these prophesying and revelations [the small plates], and put them with the remainder of my record [the plates of Mormon]” (W of M 1:6).

But Mormon does not here indicate that he bound the small plates with his own plates, only that he “put them with” his plates. Given the primary meaning of the word “put” in English at the time the Book of Mormon was translated—“To set, lay or place”—Mormon likely meant that he set, laid, or placed the two sets of plates together.¹⁴ The phrase “put them with” appears in the Book of Mormon only twice, both times in the Words of Mormon, just a few verses apart. In verse 10, Mormon uses the phrase again, this time to describe what King Benjamin had previously done with the small plates after having received them from Amaleki: “Wherefore, it came to pass that after Amaleki had delivered up these plates into the hands of king Benjamin, he took them and *put them with* the other plates, which contained records which had been handed down by the kings” (W of M 1:10, emphasis added).

Mormon’s parallel use of “put them with” to describe what he and Benjamin both did with the small plates illuminates what that phrase did—and did not—mean to Mormon. It appears that in Mormon’s

13. Examples of this assumption can be found widely across time in Latter-day Saint discourse on the Book of Mormon. See, for example, B. H. Roberts, *An Analysis of the Book of Mormon: Suggestions to the Reader* (Millennial Star Office, 1888), 3, <https://scripturecentral.org/archive/books/book/analysis-book-mormon-suggestions-reader?searchId=0eb3e36fb24dcd9bb1dbece1531216b59539a8fde17ee80224af0653c92aa3-en-v=e261582>; John A. Tvedtnes, “Composition and History of the Book of Mormon,” *New Era*, September 1974, 41–43, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/1974/09/composition-and-history-of-the-book-of-mormon>; Eldin Ricks, “The Formation of the Book of Mormon Plates,” *Improvement Era*, November 1960, 796–97, 852–54, <https://archive.org/details/improvementera6311unse/mode/2up>; and Grant R. Hardy, “Book of Mormon Plates and Records,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, vol. 1, *A–D* (Macmillan, 1992), https://eom.byu.edu/index.php?title=Book_of_Mormon_Plates_and_Records.

14. American Dictionary of the English Language, under “put,” Websters Dictionary 1828, accessed August 31, 2025, <https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/put>.

understanding, whatever Benjamin had done with the small plates in “put[ting] them with” the large plates, Mormon himself did with the small plates in “put[ting] them with” his plates of Mormon.

So, what did Benjamin do and not do with the small plates? Fortunately, Mormon revealed this a few verses earlier, showing that Benjamin did not bind the small plates to the large plates but merely placed them together in the same repository. Mormon reported, “After I had made an abridgment from the plates of Nephi, down to the reign of this king Benjamin, of whom Amaleki spake [in Omni 1:23–25], I searched among the records which had been delivered into my hands, and I found these plates, which contained this small account of the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of this king Benjamin, and also many of the words of Nephi” (W of M 1:3). Had the small plates been bound together with the large plates by King Benjamin before Mormon abridged them, Mormon would have had both records within the same bound set, with no need to “search among” other records to find the small plates.

Thus, when Mormon wrote that King Benjamin took the small plates and “put them with” the large plates (v. 10), he most likely again used the phrase in its face-value sense—“placed them with,” rather than “bound them with.” Mormon applied the same phrase, “put them with,” to his own curating of the plates a few verses earlier (v. 6). Nothing in his language suggests binding two sets of plates together. Absent any idea in the Book of Mormon text that Nephi’s small plates and Mormon’s plates were bound together, Moroni’s omission of the small plates from the title page seems natural.

The Evidence of Nineteenth-Century Historical Sources

If Nephi’s small plates and Mormon’s plates were not bound together, this suggests the possibility that our present Book of Mormon text was translated from two independent sets of plates—that is, from two distinct



FIGURE 2. *Keystone*, Ben Crowder, 2024, made with Figma, Affinity Designer, and Affinity Photo. Courtesy Ben Crowder.

records that were not ringed together into a single set.¹⁵ External evidence from historical sources suggests how these separate plates were translated and transported. Having separate sets of plates explains an intriguing series of events in the translation of the Book of Mormon—namely, that Joseph Smith concluded the translation of Mormon’s plates in Harmony, Pennsylvania at the end of May 1829, returned those plates to the angel (in line with the angel’s own earlier instruction to return them when he was done translating them), and then relocated to New York before beginning the translation of Nephi’s small plates.

Scholarship concurs that after the manuscript forepart of Mormon’s abridgment was stolen, Joseph Smith did not immediately translate the small plates he would replace it with. Rather, he resumed translating where he had left off in the plates of Mormon, at the book of Mosiah. He translated those plates through their conclusion with the book of Moroni and title page. (The title page, which describes Moroni’s completed record and does not mention the small plates, was reportedly placed at the end of Moroni’s record.)¹⁶ When he finished with Mormon’s plates, Joseph translated the small plates of Nephi.¹⁷ Consequently, once Joseph

15. For descriptions of the stack of plates being bound together by rings see documents 97, 107, and 146 in “Documents of the Translation of the Book of Mormon,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch, 2d. ed. (Brigham Young University Press; Deseret Book, 2017), 175, 181, 202.

16. Joseph reported that “the Title Page of the Book of Mormon is a literal translation taken from the very last leaf, on the left hand side of the collection or book of plates, which contained the record which has been translated.” “History Drafts, 1838–Circa 1841,” in Davidson and others, eds., *Histories, Volume 1*, 352. This suggests that the title page may have been the final portion of Mormon’s plates that Joseph translated before (as described below) returning the plates in May 1829 to the messenger who had delivered them. Such data points regarding the structure of the plates support the view that Nephi’s small plates were bound separately from Mormon’s plates. Various scholars have concluded that the evidence makes it implausible for Nephi’s small plates to have had a position within Mormon’s plate stack. While the author interned with the Joseph Smith Papers Project working with the 1820s sources, Michael Hubbard Mackay and other scholars examined the evidence for the placement of the small plates in Mormon’s record and found no placement consistent with the evidence. Latter-day Saint scholars Terryl and Nathaniel Givens similarly assessed the evidence for where the plates of Nephi could fit in Mormon’s plate stack and “gave up not because it was indeterminate but because no location at all made sense.” Nathaniel Givens, personal communication to author, February 9, 2021.

17. For the small plates being translated after Mormon’s plates, see J. B. Haws, “The Lost 116 Pages Story: What We Do Know,” in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Andrew H. Hedges, John Hilton III, and Kerry Hull (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Deseret Book, 2015), 90–92; Brent Lee Metcalfe, “The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of

had translated through the book of Moroni, he no longer needed the plates of Mormon but could exclusively employ Nephi's small plates.

So, if Mormon's plates and Nephi's small plates were part of a single set, bound together with the same rings, we might expect Joseph to retain the set of plates given him by the messenger at Cumorah until he finished translating the whole set, including the small plates. On the other hand, if Mormon's plates and Nephi's small plates were separate sets, individually bound, we might expect Joseph to surrender Mormon's plates back into the angel's care after he translated these to their end (the book of Moroni) but before he acquired and translated Nephi's small plates. And this, per the scholars and sources cited below, is exactly what he did.

David Whitmer, a participant in Joseph's move from Harmony, Pennsylvania, to Fayette, New York, reported—as we shall examine further—that Joseph described returning the plates he had been translating to the messenger prior to this move. Examining the chronology of translation and Whitmer's report, we will see that Joseph returned the plates given him at Cumorah immediately after concluding his translation of the plates of Mormon and before beginning to translate the small plates—just as we might expect if these two sets of plates were separate.

Translation Chronology

Four scholars independently producing translation timelines have all converged on the same timing for when Joseph completed the plates of Mormon. These chronologists agree partly because of two revelations given to Joseph in Harmony, Pennsylvania, at the end of May 1829, just before he moved to Fayette, New York.¹⁸ These two revelations (D&C 11 and 12) allude to and employ language from the final chapters of the plates of Mormon (Moro. 7–10), placing the translation of those concluding chapters just before these revelations and thus just before the move.¹⁹

Mormon Exegesis," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Signature Books, 1993), 395–444; and Royal Skousen, "Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 1 (1994): 121–44.

18. "Revelation, May 1829–A [D&C 11]," and "Revelation, May 1829–B [D&C 12]," in MacKay and others, *Documents, Volume 1*, 50–57.

19. John W. Welch, "[Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon: 'Days \[and Hours\] Never to Be Forgotten'](#)," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2018): 10–50; Patrick A. Bishop, *Day After Day: The Translation of the Book of Mormon* (Eborn Publishing, 2018); Elden J. Watson, "Approximate Book of Mormon Translation Timeline," April

John W. Welch, for instance, notes that the phrase “deny not” (repeated several times in Moroni 10) was used in a revelation for Hyrum Smith in Harmony at the end of May 1829 (D&C 11:25). For instance, Moroni 10:7 states, “And ye may know that he is, by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore I would exhort you that ye deny not the power of God,” connecting God’s power with his Spirit. Doctrine and Covenants 11 reads, “Deny not the spirit of revelation, nor the spirit of prophecy, for wo unto him that denieth these things” (D&C 11:25), paralleling the content of Moroni 10. Several such correlations between Moroni 7 and 10 and Doctrine and Covenants 11 and 12 can be found. Since the use of these phrases in the book of Moroni is a probable prompt for their clustered use in Doctrine and Covenants, Moroni 7 and 10 were likely received before or around the same time that Joseph relocated to Fayette from Harmony.²⁰

The beginning of the small plates’ translation can be pegged with similar precision to just after this move, enabling us to test the expectation that Joseph began translating the small plates only after returning the plates of Mormon to the messenger. In late May, David Whitmer arrived in Harmony to transport Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery to the Whitmer residence in Fayette. If Joseph had just finished with the plates of Mormon at Harmony, he would have begun translation of the small plates in Fayette, starting at 1 Nephi. And this is precisely what he did. The handwriting of a new scribe (now identified as John Whitmer, who was then in Fayette) appears in the original manuscript of the first chapter of 1 Nephi, demonstrating that this text was translated there.²¹ Thus, there was a clean break between Joseph’s completion of translating the plates of Mormon in Pennsylvania and his resumption of translation with the small plates of Nephi in New York.

1995, <http://www.eldenwatson.net/BoM.htm>; Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: the Making of a Prophet* (Signature Books, 2004), 363.

20. Welch, “Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon,” 35.

21. The original manuscript of the Book of Mormon shows a shift of handwriting to another scribe, initially identified by Royal Skousen as an anonymous “Scribe 2,” in the original chapter 1 of First Nephi, at what is now 1 Nephi 3:7. Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2001), 14. Skousen has subsequently identified this “Scribe 2” as John Whitmer. Royal Skousen, “[The History of the Book of Mormon Text: Parts 5 and 6 of Volume 3 of the Critical Text](#),” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2020): 115. Joseph Smith noted that “John Whitmer, in particular, assisted us very much in writing during the remainder of the work” of translation at the Whitmer residence. “*History Drafts, 1838–Circa 1841*,” 308.

Whitmer's Report

Why the coincidence of Joseph simultaneously switching plates and states? David Whitmer offers a clue. Whitmer reports that “the messenger who had the plates . . . had taken them from Joseph just prior to our starting from Harmony.”²² Thus, after completing the plates of Mormon, Joseph promptly surrendered the plates he had been given at Cumorah—a particularly fitting action if the plates he had been given at Cumorah were exclusively the plates of Mormon.

Along the road to Fayette, according to Whitmer, they encountered a man whom Joseph afterward identified as the messenger carrying the plates: “Said he [the messenger] I am only going over to Comorah—& Suddenly disappeared—they stop[p]ed the team—amazed at the Sudden disappearance of the fine looking stranger he [Whitmer] says that they all felt so strangely—that they asked the Prophet to enquire of the Lord who this stranger was. Soon David said they turned around & Joseph looked pale almost transparent & said that was one of the Nephites and he had the Plates of the Book of Mormon in the knapsac[k].”²³

Perhaps Joseph returned the plates he had translated to the messenger so the messenger could ferry them to Fayette for him. Yet this explanation comes up short for multiple reasons. First, the messenger was understood to be taking these plates back to Cumorah rather than to Fayette. Second, Joseph relates in his 1838–1839 history that once the messenger delivered the plates of Mormon into his hands, Joseph was responsible for them until he returned them to angelic care. He wrote, “the same heavenly messenger delivered them up to me with this charge that I should be responsible for them. That . . . if I would use all my endeavours to preserve them *until* <he> (the messenger) called should call for them, they should be protected. . . . [W]hen I had done what was required at my hand, he would call for them.”²⁴

22. “David Whitmer Interview with Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith, 7–8 September 1878,” in *Early Mormon Documents*, comp. and ed. Dan Vogel, 5 vols. (Signature Books, 1996–2003), 5:51–52, reproduced from “Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith,” *Deseret News*, November 16, 1878.

23. Edward Stevenson, Journal, February 9, 1886, 24:34–36 [image 38–40], Edward Stevenson Collection 1849–1922, Church History Catalog, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/9f4720e3-45cf-4f74-8e7c-94374708b5e4/0/39>.

24. “History Drafts, 1838–Circa 1841,” 236–38, emphasis added. See also Joseph Smith—History 1:59–60.

What Joseph reported by his words, he confirmed by his deeds. He behaved as if it were his responsibility to protect the plates until his work with them was done and the angel called for them. When thieves came for the plates in New York, Joseph took the plates to Pennsylvania. He also cut “a good cudgel” (a type of club) to protect the plates from the thieves who waylaid him on the journey.²⁵ Based on past attacks by multiple robbers—who “struck him with a club,” “shot at” him, and searched his wagon “very carefully,”²⁶—if Joseph had the option of a secure angelic courier carrying the plates to Pennsylvania, why would he choose to endanger them by carrying them himself? Joseph’s actions imply precisely what the angel instructed—that these plates were to remain in his care until translated. Continuing his narration, Joseph related that he did precisely as the messenger had charged him to do—protected the plates himself until he was done translating them and the messenger called for them: “multitudes were on the alert continually to get them from me if possible but by the wisdom of God they remained safe in my hands until I had accomplished by them what was required at my hand, when according to arrangement the messenger called for them, I delivered them up to him and he has them in his charge until this day.”²⁷

The logic of the messenger’s instructions to Joseph, and of Joseph’s consequent actions, suggest that when he returned the plates to the messenger in Harmony, it was not to have them ferried to Fayette; rather, Joseph returned the plates to the messenger because he “had accomplished by them what was required” of him and the messenger “called for them.” He was done translating those plates.

Why was Joseph’s move to Fayette, New York, simultaneous with the messenger’s journey to Cumorah? Fayette was just twenty-seven miles from Cumorah, far more convenient than the 130 miles from Harmony. If Mormon’s plates and the small plates were separate sets, then after finishing with Mormon’s plates, Joseph would have anticipated needing to return to Cumorah to acquire the small plates. So, rather than leaving

25. “Martin Harris Interview with Joel Tiffany, January 1859,” in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:310, reproduced from “Mormonism—No. II,” *Tiffany’s Monthly: Devoted to the Investigation of the Science of Mind, in the Physical, Intellectual, Moral and Religious Planes Thereof*, 5, no. 4 (August 1859): 170.

26. Orson Pratt, *A Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions, and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records* (Edinburgh, 1840), 13–14, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/2821>.

27. “History Drafts, 1838–Circa 1841,” 238. Compare Joseph Smith—History 1:60.

Joseph's simultaneous change of plates and states as mere coincidence, the model of two discrete sets of plates predicts and accounts for Joseph moving when he did—upon the completion of Mormon's plates—and where he did: to New York (fig. 3).²⁸

How, then, did Joseph acquire the small plates?²⁹ Did he return to the Hill Cumorah as intended, perhaps visiting the “cave of records” spoken of in mid-nineteenth century sources, to acquire the small plates before he began translating again?³⁰ No historical sources describe him making a trip to Cumorah when he arrived at Fayette and before translating the small plates. And, as events played out, it appears there would have been no need for him to do so after all.

28. Another explanation that could be offered for Joseph and Oliver relocating to the Whitmer home at the end of May 1829, albeit one that does not account for them doing so upon completing the plates of Mormon, is the idea that the Whitmers had initiated this relocation by offering their home for the remainder of the translation. However, David Whitmer stated emphatically that the initiative for the relocation came from Joseph, who requested the Whitmers to open up their home: “Soon after I received another letter from Cowdery, telling me to come down into Pennsylvania and bring him and Joseph to my father’s house, giving me a reason therefor that they had received a commandment from God to that effect.” David Whitmer, “Mormonism,” *Kansas City Journal*, June 5, 1881, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/daac9ale-5938-4487-9610-0e4e5b5981ed/0/0>. Similarly, persecution in Harmony may be cited as a reason for the relocation. Although Joseph’s reminiscent history of this early period mentions persecution around the time of his and Oliver’s encounter with John the Baptist on May 15, 1829, he does not give this as a reason for their subsequent relocation to Fayette. It seems likely that Joseph mistakenly placed this persecution in 1829 when it actually belonged in 1828. Joseph’s recollection describes Emma’s father’s family (Hales) but not her mother’s family (Lewis) as a bulwark against this persecution. This suggests that some of the persecution occurred in the summer of 1828, when the Lewises managed to get Joseph expelled from the Methodist probationary class and threatened to have him investigated on the charge of being “a practicing necromancer.” “Joseph and Hiel Lewis Statements, 1879,” in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:311, reproducing Joseph Lewis, “Review of Mormonism. Rejoinder to Elder Cadwell,” *Amboy (Ill.) Journal*, June 11, 1879, 1. Despite such evidence for 1828 persecutions against Joseph in Harmony, no extant evidence indicates that there were persecutions against him there in 1829. There is also no evidence that Joseph and Oliver slackened their pace of translation in April–May 1829 while at Harmony. In fact, Joseph did his most rapid translation work at precisely this time. See Bradley, *Lost 116 Pages*, 97–101.

29. Joseph Smith never explained how he acquired the small plates, perhaps in line with his 1831 statement that “it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the book of Mormon, & also said that it was not expedient for him to relate these things.” “Volume 1 Introduction,” xxix.

30. See Cameron J. Packer, “Cumorah’s Cave,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 13, no. 1–2 (2004): 50–57.

Church History Sites in Western New York, 1820–1831

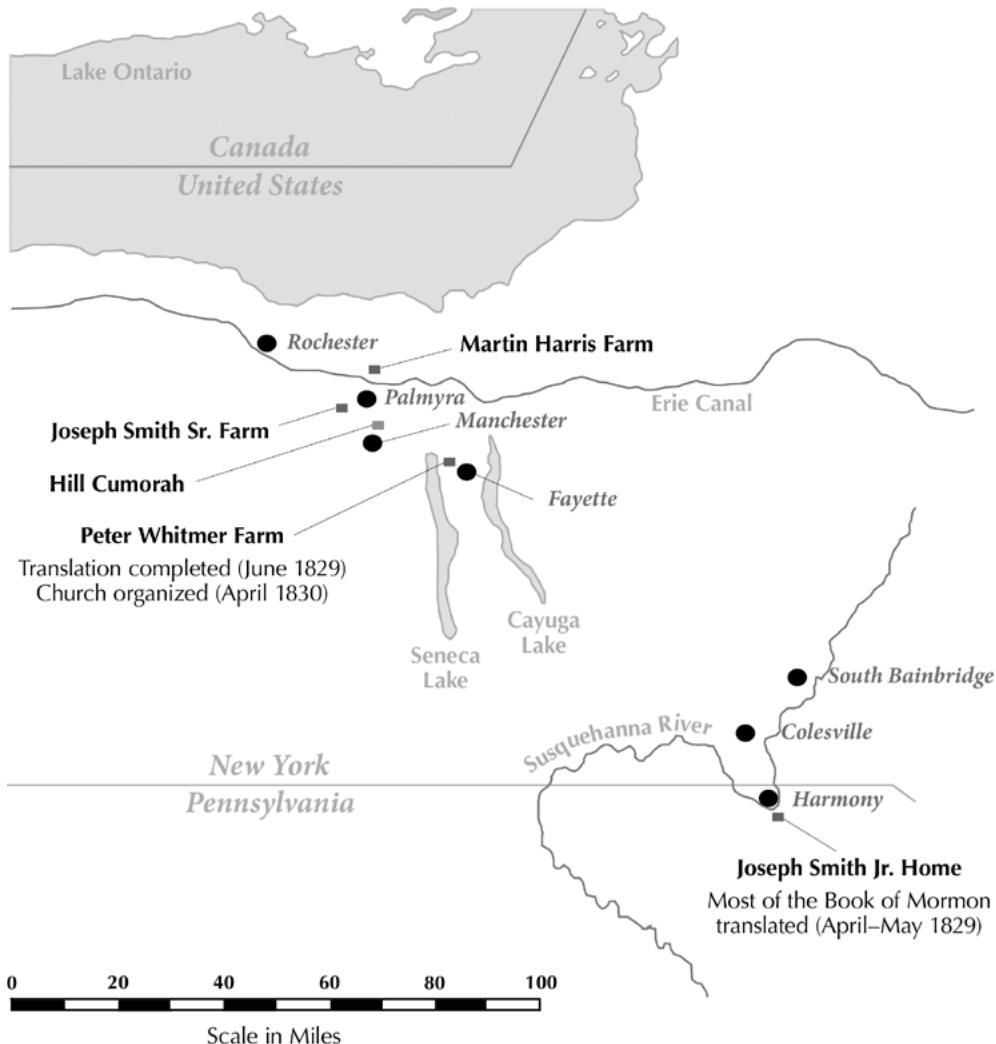


FIGURE 3. Map showing Fayette, New York; the Hill Cumorah; and Harmony, Pennsylvania. “Church History Sites in Western New York, 1820–1831,” in John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon* (Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999), chart 1-12. Courtesy John W. Welch.

Mary Whitmer's Witness

David Whitmer reported that on arriving at the Peter and Mary Muselman Whitmer home, Joseph, Oliver, and David felt a spiritual impression that the person they had met on the road with the plates was there. This messenger promptly made another appearance. “The next Morning,” David recalled, his mother Mary Whitmer “saw the Person at the Shed and he took the Plates from A Box & Showed them to her.”³¹ What plates did he bring? The plates Joseph needed at this point were those he had not yet translated—the small plates of Nephi. The messenger, who had been headed to Cumorah, brought these plates from Cumorah to Fayette. The messenger would thus have brought the small plates right when they were needed—just in time for Joseph to translate them.³²



FIGURE 4. *Mary Whitmer Seeing the Plates*, Steve Nethercott, 2021, digital illustration. Courtesy Real Hero Studios, www.realherostudios.com.

31. Stevenson, Journal, December 23, 1877, 14:18 [image 24]. According to David Whitmer's account, “My mother was going to milk the cows, when she was met out near the yard by the same old man (judging by her description of him) who said to her, ‘You have been very faithful and diligent in your labors, but you are tired because of the increase of your toil, it is proper therefore that you should receive a witness that your faith may be strengthened.’ Thereupon he showed her the plates.” “David Whitmer Interview with Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith,” in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:51–52; Royal Skousen, “Another Account of Mary Whitmer's Viewing of the Golden Plates,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 10 (2014): 36; Amy Easton-Flake and Rachel Cope, “A Multiplicity of Witnesses: Women and the Translation Process,” in Larney and others, *Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*, 133–36.

32. While it would make the most sense for the messenger to bring to the Whitmer farm the plates Joseph had not yet translated—the small plates, the messenger may have brought both sets of plates. One nineteenth-century Utah Latter-day Saint, after hearing the story of Mary Whitmer from David Whitmer, understood that the plates the angel showed her were Mormon's plates. Edward Stevenson, who heard David Whitmer relate Mary Whitmer's report in 1877, 1886, and 1887, wrote in his 1886 journal entry after his second Whitmer interview that the angel had shown Mary Whitmer a set of plates that were partly sealed, which, if accurate, would presumably have been the plates of Mormon.

That Mary Whitmer named the messenger “Brother Nephi” may echo the name of Nephi’s small plates that the messenger showed to her.³³ Mary Whitmer’s encounter with the heavenly bearer of the plates has typically been interpreted as a purely personal experience given to her for her own comfort and edification but with no spiritually substantive role in the Book of Mormon’s coming forth. Yet Mary Whitmer’s experience appears to have had just such a role. Mary’s experience of the angel coming to the Whitmer farm with plates showed that the needed plates arrived there without Joseph having to get them from Cumorah. Her experience thus also accounts for why Joseph immediately resumed translating without returning to Cumorah first.

In this light, Joseph’s realization that he did not need to return to the hill to get the small plates may have come, not by revelation to himself, but by revelation to Mary Whitmer. And it was a momentous revelation. Amy Easton-Flake and Rachel Cope have noted, “When Mary was shown the plates, she became the first known individual to see them besides Joseph Smith. Within the month, all of the male members of her family, except for her husband, would join her in witnessing the physical reality of the plates.”³⁴ As Mary Magdalene saw the risen Lord before the Twelve disciples and testified of this to them, Mary Muselman Whitmer saw the plates and the messenger before the formal

The assertion that Mary Whitmer saw the sealed plates is absent from Stevenson’s account of his earlier 1877 interview from the more detailed interview report by Joseph F. Smith and Orson Pratt that same year, and from all other reports of Mary Whitmer’s experience. Stevenson may have confused David Whitmer’s account of his mother’s experience of the plates with David’s own oft-repeated description of the plates as partly sealed based on *his own* experience of them as one of the Three Witnesses. “Edward Stevenson Interview, Diary, December 22–23, 1877,” in *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness*, ed. Lyndon W. Cook (Grandin Book, 1991), 13; “David Whitmer Interview with Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith,” in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:51–52; “Edward Stevenson Interview, Diary, February 9, 1886,” in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 181–82; and E. Stevenson, “A Visit to David Whitmer,” *Juvenile Instructor* 22, no. 4 (February 15, 1887): 55.

33. That Nephi was involved at some point in the reception or transportation of plates is suggested by Joseph Smith’s conflation of Nephi and Moroni in the earliest draft of his 1838 History. “History Drafts, 1838–Circa 1841,” 222. (See also discussion of this variant in “History Drafts, 1838–Circa 1841,” 223n56.) Were Nephi not involved in some such way, it is difficult to understand why both Mary Whitmer and the Prophet Joseph employed the name Nephi as that of a messenger involved in the coming forth of the book of plates.

34. Easton-Flake and Cope, “Multiplicity of Witnesses,” 133–53.

witness experiences of the twelve (Joseph Smith, the Three Witnesses, and the Eight Witnesses) and testified of this experience to them.³⁵ Though the roles of others besides Joseph in the Book of Mormon's emergence have historically tended to be minimized, this is especially true of women, whose important roles are only recently beginning to be recognized and documented.³⁶

Conclusion

While interpreters of the Book of Mormon have sometimes read into the Words of Mormon that Nephi's small plates were bound with the plates of Mormon, the text does not say this. Indeed, the textual data of the Words of Mormon and the title page are at least as well explained—if not much better explained—on the model that Nephi's small plates were simply placed with, rather than bound with, the plates of Mormon. Historical sources and the Book of Mormon's translation timeline also align

35. Mary Magdalene's role in testifying of the resurrected Christ to the Twelve garnered for her in early Christianity the designation of "apostle to the apostles." See Brendan McConvery, "Hippolytus' Commentary on the Song of Songs and John 20: Intertextual Reading in Early Christianity," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 71, no. 3–4 (2006): 211–22, for an example of this from early in the second century.

36. For an insightful discussion of the neglect of women's roles in the Book of Mormon's emergence and an attempt to recover some of those roles, see Amy Easton-Flake and Rachel Cope, "Reconfiguring the Archive: Women and the Social Production of the Book of Mormon," in *Producing Ancient Scripture: Joseph Smith's Translation Projects in the Development of Mormon Christianity*, ed. Michael Hubbard MacKay, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Brian M. Hauglid (University of Utah Press, 2020), 105–34. Where published work on the coming forth of the Book of Mormon has acknowledged the roles played by others, including Mary Whitmer, these have almost always tended to be in the form of acknowledging their temporal assistance in the work, such as keeping Joseph with lodging and provisions while he translated. A salutary new trend toward greater acknowledgment of women's roles in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, including their roles as informal witnesses, may be found in several recent articles from Scripture Central, including "How Did Emma Smith Help Bring Forth the Book of Mormon?," *Scripture Central*, KnoWhy #386, August 21, 2019, <https://scripturecentral.org/knowhy/how-did-emma-smith-help-bring-forth-the-book-of-mormon?searchId=b99055ddcb9769a6e5f3f41f86110ed7a28ca06baa2f5660c8e73da305646ff1-en-v=e261582>; "What Does Mary Whitmer Teach Us About Enduring Trials?," *Scripture Central*, KnoWhy #455, August 21, 2019, <http://scripturecentral.org/knowhy/what-does-mary-whitmer-teach-us-about-enduring-trials?searchId=b99055ddcb9769a6e5f3f41f86110ed7a28ca06baa2f5660c8e73da305646ff1-en-v=e261582>; and Chris Heimerdinger, "5 Women Who Are Witnesses of the Physical Golden Plates," *Scripture Central*, March 2, 2018, <https://scripturecentral.org/blog/5-women-who-are-witnesses-of-the-physical-golden-plates?searchId=b99055ddcb9769a6e5f3f41f86110ed7a28ca06baa2f5660c8e73da305646ff1-en-v=e261582>.



FIGURE 5. *The Gold Plates*, by Anthony Sweat, 2014, 8" x 10", watercolor and ink. Courtesy Anthony Sweat.

tion. The Restoration has sometimes been depicted as a kind of one-man show in which Joseph played all the spiritually significant parts. Yet, if the Book of Mormon was translated from two sets of plates, with the angelic “Brother Nephi” as courier of the small plates and Mary Whitmer as a witness and recipient of a substantive visitation, this points to a richer story in which some of Joseph Smith’s ministerial coworkers have previously unacknowledged revelatory roles.³⁷

Recognizing that the Book of Mormon was likely translated from two distinct sets of plates (the plates of Mormon and the small plates of Nephi) reveals a God who brought Joseph more than one record, by more than one messenger, and witnessed by more than one gender. This view is supported by textual and historical evidence as well as Mary Whitmer’s witness. By expanding our vision of that sacred work in the past, we gain insights that can enrich our vision of God’s work in the present.

37. The Prophet Joseph Smith has unquestionably been the central instrument in God’s hands to inaugurate the work of restoration. Yet, as President Russell M. Nelson has taught, the Restoration was not a one-time work, either by Joseph or anyone else; rather, it is an ongoing process in which we participate. Russell M. Nelson, “[Hear Him](#),” *Liahona*, May 2020, 88. For example, Martin Harris received a vision, as stated by Joseph in his 1832 history: “a man by the name of Martin Har[r]is . . . became convinced of th[e] vision and . . . the Lord appeared unto him in a vision and shewed unto him his marvilous work which he was about to do and <h[e]> imediately came to Suquehannah and said the Lord had shown him that he must go to new York City <with> some of the characters so we proceeded to copy some of them and he took his Journy to the Eastern Cittys and to the Learned.” “History, circa Summer 1832,” in Davidson and others, *Histories, Volume 1*, 15. See also Welch, *Opening the Heavens*.

with this model, indicating that Joseph Smith returned the plates to the angel just when we would expect if those plates contained only Mormon’s record, not Nephi’s small plates.

Recognizing that the Book of Mormon text as we have it was likely translated from two sets of plates rather than one has significant implications for understanding the Restora-

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Visiting Palmyra

In autumn, I envision April, dry gray
trees restored to their budding leaves,
the boy to his knees in blossoms

and my Emma and I, hand in hand, cold
this November weekend driving in angels'
footsteps. Instead of numb ears, squirrel

scamp, and train song, imagine a sea
of glass and fire. Replace gale-force gusts
and geese squawk with glory. Or remember

December 1819, that winter before spring,
when it seemed that nothing had happened
yet. Don't forget that aching part, waiting

for a vision to start. We left the grove for
Harmony and stopped for pizza near the
Susquehanna. If that's the lesson—*dark*

before light—it's too simple, and hard
as a firstborn's gravestone. But on the
highway home, when night's thick dark

seizes our tongues, snowflakes descend
gradually until they fall upon us. I see
them appear in each passing streetlamp

pole: intermittent pillars of electric glow.

—Isaac James Richards

This poem won third place in the 2025 BYU Studies
Poetry Contest.

“Sight and Power to Translate”

Revelatory Translation, Seership, and Joseph Smith’s Scriptural Productions

Stephen O. Smoot

[An earlier version of this paper was originally delivered at the Joseph Smith Papers Conference in Salt Lake City on September 10, 2021.]

The Lord, in his great mercy, has condescended to give miraculous evidence to establish the Divine Authenticity of that great and glorious revelation—the Book of Mormon.¹

In a talk delivered during the April 2020 General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Elder Ulisses Soares of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles reaffirmed a core principle of Latter-day Saint faith: that the early visionary experiences of Joseph Smith were real and that the translation of the Book of Mormon was a miracle.² Elder Soares stated on that occasion:

This sacred ancient record was not “translated” in the traditional way that scholars would translate ancient texts by learning an ancient language. We ought to look at the process more like a “revelation” with the aid of physical instruments provided by the Lord, as opposed to a “translation” by one with knowledge of languages. Joseph Smith declared that through God’s power he “translated the Book of Mormon from [hieroglyphs], the knowledge of which was lost to the world, in which wonderful event [he] stood alone, an unlearned youth, to combat the

1. Orson Pratt, *Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon* (Liverpool, 1850–51), 68.

2. Ulisses Soares, “The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, May 2020, 32–35.

worldly wisdom and multiplied ignorance of eighteen centuries, with a new revelation.” The Lord’s help in the translation of the plates—or revelation, so to speak—is also evident when considering the miraculously short time Joseph Smith took to translate them.³

Nearly six decades earlier, Elder Bruce R. McConkie, then a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, gave a talk in the April 1964 General Conference in which he made a similar affirmation. Reflecting on the events following the First Vision, Elder McConkie taught: “In due course, amid testings and trials, other revelations came [to Joseph Smith]. The Book of Mormon was revealed, translated, and published as a new witness of Christ and his gospel—an inspired record of God’s dealings with the ancient inhabitants of America. . . . New light and knowledge, new revelation, to meet all the challenges of a modern world, were added to the canon of scripture.”⁴

Elder Soares’s comment on the coming forth of the Book of Mormon—like Elder McConkie’s before him—illustrates a persistent question central to Joseph Smith’s scriptural contributions: Should these texts be understood primarily as revelations or translations? The tension bound up in this question arises mainly from the Prophet’s method of translation that defied conventional standards and methods, and is exemplified in two recent publications: *Producing Ancient Scripture: Joseph Smith’s Translation Projects in the Development of Mormon Christianity* and *Joseph Smith’s Translation: The Words and Worlds of Early Mormonism*. That two separate academic presses have published these books addressing this tension underscores the enduring relevance of this topic.⁵

3. Soares, “Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon,” 33, citing “History, 1838–1856, Volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844],” 1775, Joseph Smith Papers, Church Historian’s Press, accessed June 18, 2025, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/147>; and “Letter to James Arlington Bennet, 13 November 1843,” in *Documents, Volume 13: August–December 1843*, ed. Christian K. Heimburger, Jeffrey D. Mahas, Brent M. Rogers, Mason K. Allred, J. Chase Kirkham, and Matthew S. McBride, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian’s Press, 2022), 258–70, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-james-arlington-bennet-13-november-1843/1>.

4. Bruce R. McConkie, in *One Hundred Thirty-Fourth Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1964), 26–27.

5. Michael Hubbard MacKay, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Brian M. Hauglid, eds., *Producing Ancient Scripture: Joseph Smith’s Translation Projects in the Development of Mormon Christianity* (University of Utah Press, 2020); Samuel Morris Brown, *Joseph Smith’s Translation: The Words and Worlds of Early Mormonism* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

This paper examines the documentary record surrounding the production of Joseph Smith's scriptural texts to shed light on how he and early Latter-day Saints understood his role as a seer and his divine calling as a translator. It focuses on the translation of the Book of Mormon (1828–1829), including the revelations tied to its production, and the creation of the book of Abraham (1835–1842). I argue that the modern dichotomy of revelation versus translation is largely an external framework imposed on Joseph Smith's conceptualization of these texts and his role in producing them. For Joseph and the early Saints, revelation and translation were nearly synonymous because both categories converged within his role as a seer.

The Translation of the Book of Mormon

By Joseph Smith's own declaration, the Book of Mormon is the keystone of the Latter-day Saint faith.⁶ This makes it striking and perhaps even counterintuitive how reserved Joseph was in describing the process of rendering the text. During an 1831 conference of elders in Ohio, Hyrum Smith solicited "information of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon" from his brother, but the Prophet demurred, stating "that it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the book of Mormon."⁷

While Joseph occasionally recounted aspects of the book's origin, his descriptions were characteristically brief. In an 1833 letter to Noah Saxton,⁸ an 1843 letter to James Arlington Bennet,⁹ and in accounts

6. "Remarks, 28 November 1841," 112, Joseph Smith Papers, Church Historian's Press, accessed June 18, 2025, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/remarks-28-november-1841/1>. "Sunday, I spent the day at Brigham Young's in the company of Joseph Smith and the Twelve, conversing on a variety of subjects. It was an interesting day. Elder Joseph Fielding was present, he having been in England for four years. We also met with a number of English brethren. Joseph remarked that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth and the keystone of our religion, and that a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than by any other book." The spelling, punctuation, and grammar of manuscript sources in this paper have been standardized, whereas published historical sources are quoted in their original form.

7. "Minutes, 25–26 October 1831," in *Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833*, ed. Matthew C. Godfrey, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2013), 84, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-25-26-october-1831/4>.

8. "Letter to Noah C. Saxton, 4 January 1833," in Godfrey, and others, eds., *Documents, Volume 2*, 354.

9. "Letter to James Arlington Bennet, 13 November 1843," 261.

published in 1838 and 1842,¹⁰ he described the translation as being accomplished through “the gift and power of God” with the aid of divinely prepared stones—a sentiment he also expressed in the preface to the 1830 first edition of the Book of Mormon.¹¹ At the same time, Joseph sometimes spoke of the Book of Mormon as the product of inspiration. In an 1840 discourse, he told a crowd that the book “was communicated to him, *direct from Heaven*.” The auditor of the speech, Matthew L. Davis, recorded that while Joseph claimed to be the “Author” of the book in a technical sense, “the idea that he wished to impress was, that he had penned it as dictated by God.”¹²

By piecing together firsthand statements from the Prophet and accounts from those who assisted in the translation and publication of the text, historians have reconstructed a reasonably reliable account of the miraculous events surrounding the translation.¹³ It is not the purpose of

10. “*Elders’ Journal*, July 1838,” 42, Joseph Smith Papers, Church Historian’s Press, accessed June 18, 2025, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/elders-journal-july-1838/10>; “*Church History*,” 1 March 1842, in *Documents, Volume 9: December 1841–April 1842*, ed. Alex D. Smith, Christian K. Heimburger, and Christopher James Blythe, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian’s Press, 2019), 183, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-1-march-1842/5#facts>.

11. Joseph Smith Junior, *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon, upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi* (Palmyra, 1830), iii, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-mormon-1830/9>.

12. “*Discourse, 5 February 1840*,” in *Documents, Volume 7: September 1839–January 1841*, ed. Matthew C. Godfrey, Spencer W. McBride, Alex D. Smith, and Christopher James Blythe, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian’s Press, 2017), 179, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-5-february-1840/3>, emphasis original. The editors of the Joseph Smith Papers note that the Prophet’s use of the term “author” for the Book of Mormon appears to address claims that he either fabricated the text or borrowed it from another source. Indeed, to meet copyright requirements, the 1830 first edition of the Book of Mormon identified Joseph Smith as its “Author and Proprietor.” See Miriam A. Smith and John W. Welch, “Joseph Smith: ‘Author and Proprietor?’” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Deseret Book, 1992), 154–57; Nathaniel Hinckley Wadsworth, “*Copyright Laws and the 1830 Book of Mormon*,” *BYU Studies* 45, no. 3 (2006): 77–96; and Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One: 1 Nephi–2 Nephi 10* (Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2014), 35–36. See also “*Oliver Cowdery’s Letter to Cornelius C. Blatchly, November 9, 1829*,” in *A Documentary History of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Larry E. Morris (Oxford University Press, 2019), 374–75, for Oliver Cowdery’s explanation of why Joseph is identified as the Book of Mormon’s “author” in the first edition.

13. For accessible accounts, see Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Greg Kofford Books, 2007); Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Deseret

this article to revisit those details, which are already well known. Instead, to better understand what Joseph meant when he said he translated the Book of Mormon "by the gift and power of God," I will examine the revelations he received during the translation process. These revelations offer valuable insights into how Joseph and his collaborators understood his role as a translator of new scripture.

Translation as a Provisional Gift (Sections 3, 5, and 10)

As early as July 1828, Joseph Smith's revelations associated with the production of the Book of Mormon repeatedly emphasized that God had granted him both a "gift" and a "power" to translate the record. Following Martin Harris's loss of the 116 pages, the revelation now canonized as section 3 in the Doctrine and Covenants warned that Joseph's "right to Translate" was in jeopardy unless he repented.¹⁴ In the 1835 first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, edited under Joseph's direction, this language was revised to state that "God had given [him] s[i]ght and power to translate."¹⁵ This change explicitly introduced seeric terminology, linking the concepts of translation and seership in Joseph's thinking (see current D&C 3:12).

Another revelation tied to the loss of the manuscript, now section 10, explained that with the loss of the pages, Joseph also "lost [his] gift." His "mind became darkened," according to this revelation, and the "power given unto [him] to translate, by the means of the Urim and Thummim," was depleted. Only through divine grace and Joseph's renewed

Book, 2015); John W. Welch, "Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon: 'Days [and Hours] Never to Be Forgotten,'" *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2018): 11–50; and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat and Michael Hubbard MacKay, *Let's Talk about the Translation of the Book of Mormon* (Deseret Book, 2023). For a compilation of relevant primary sources related to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, see Morris, ed., *Documentary History of the Book of Mormon*; John W. Welch, "Documents of the Translation of the Book of Mormon," in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch, 2nd ed. (Brigham Young University Press; Deseret Book, 2017), 126–227.

14. "Revelation, July 1828 [D&C 3]," in *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*, ed. Michael Hubbard MacKay, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, *Joseph Smith Papers* (Church Historian's Press, 2013), 8, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-july-1828-dc-3/2#facts>.

15. Joseph Smith Junior, Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, Frederick G. Williams, *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints: Carefully Selected from the Revelations of God* (Kirtland, Ohio, 1835), 157, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/doctrine-and-covenants-1835/165>, hereafter cited as *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835).

faithfulness was this power “restored unto [him] again,” enabling him to “continue on unto the finishing of the remainder of the work of translation” (see current D&C 10:1–3).¹⁶

The significance of these two revelations is clear: through disobedience, the Prophet’s ability to translate was temporarily withdrawn. This underscores that Joseph’s ability—his “gift”—to translate was not inherent but was bestowed from beyond himself. Only through divine power could Joseph effectively use the Urim and Thummim or the seer stone in translating the plates.¹⁷ Without this heavenly power, the instruments were ineffective. In these revelations, the “gift” of seership and the divine “power” of the stones used in the translation were given by God to Joseph, and were not innate in the young man.

This idea is further supported by David Whitmer’s account of another incident during the translation when Joseph’s ability as a seer was briefly lost and then restored. Whitmer recalled:

[Joseph] was a religious and straightforward man. He had to be; for he was illiterate and he could do nothing of himself. He *had* to trust in God. He could not translate unless he was humble and possessed the right feelings towards every one. To illustrate, so you can see. One morning when he was getting ready to continue the translation, something went wrong about the house and he was put out about it. Something that Emma, his wife, had done. Oliver and I went up stairs, and Joseph came up soon after to continue the translation, but he could not do anything. He could not translate a single syllable. He went down stairs, out

16. *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835), 163.

17. Readers today must recognize that our earliest sources do not always clearly distinguish between the Nephite “interpreters” buried with the plates (Mosiah 8:19; 28:20; Alma 37:24–25)—a pair of transparent stones set in a metal frame resembling spectacles, later called the Urim and Thummim (for example, JS–H 1:35, 42, 52)—and Joseph Smith’s chocolate-colored, oval-shaped seer stone, which he discovered as a young man and also used in translating the record. Some of Joseph’s contemporaries occasionally referred to the brown stone as the Urim and Thummim. For example, Wilford Woodruff, “Journal (January 1, 1841–December 31, 1842),” December 27, 1841, Wilford Woodruff Papers, accessed June 27, 2025, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/LZg>, adding to the ambiguity. Further complicating matters, the Nephite “interpreters” functioned as seer stones, meaning that “both the interpreters and the single stone apparently functioned in the same way and both were used to translate the Book of Mormon.” Michael Hubbard Mackay and Nicholas J. Frederick, *Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones* (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Deseret Book, 2016), 50. Therefore, we must be cautious in assuming that every use of the term Urim and Thummim by Joseph or his contemporaries necessarily referred to the Nephite interpreters. Careful attention to context and historical details is essential in determining which instrument is being described in each instance.

into the orchard and made supplication to the Lord; was gone about an hour—came back to the house, asked Emma's forgiveness and then came up stairs where we were and the translation went on all right. He could do nothing save he was humble and faithful.¹⁸

A revelation received in March 1829 declared that Joseph had "A gift to translate the Book,"¹⁹ referring, as clarified in the printed version, to the plates of the Book of Mormon. The Lord described this as "the first gift that I bestowed upon [Joseph]" (see current D&C 5:4).²⁰ The revelation warned that if Joseph stepped beyond what God commanded him during the course of the translation, then the young seer would "have no more gift," and God "will take away the things which" he had entrusted to him (see current v. 31).²¹

Translation as Revelation (Sections 6 and 8)

One month later, a revelation jointly addressed to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery extended this sacred power to the Prophet's newly called scribe, affirming that he too had been granted "a gift" that was "sacred" and came "from above." By exercising this gift, the revelation promised that the two men would be "enlightened by the Spirit of truth," and uncover divine "mysteries" together (see current D&C 6:10–11, 15).²²

A revelation received in April 1829, now canonized as section 8 of the Doctrine and Covenants, makes this connection plain. The Lord assured Cowdery that he would "receive a knowledge of whatsoever things you shall ask with an honest heart," including "a knowledge concerning the engraveings [sic] of old Records which are ancient which contain those parts of my Scriptures of which hath been spoken by the manifestation of my Spirit." Cowdery was told that such knowledge would come "in your mind & in your heart by the Holy Ghost which shall come upon you & . . . dwell in your heart." This "spirit of Revelation," as the text calls it, would, "according to [Oliver's] faith," ultimately empower him

18. "Letter from Elder W. H. Kelley," *Saints' Herald* 29, no. 5 (March 1, 1882): 68, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/303f8d3f-6090-4cdf-862e-eb90dea38f83/0/3>, emphasis original.

19. "Revelation, March 1829 [D&C 5]," in MacKay, and others, eds., *Documents, Volume 1*, 16, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-march-1829-dc-5/1#facts>.

20. *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835), 158.

21. *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835), 160.

22. *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835), 109. See also current *Doctrine and Covenants* 8:1–3, 11.

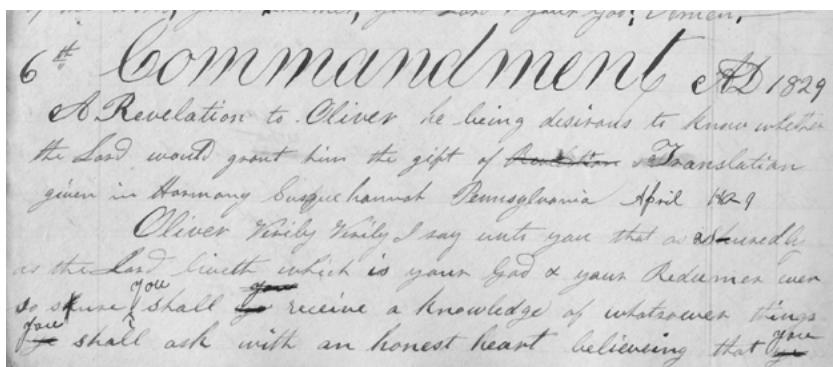


FIGURE 1. "Revelation, April 1829-B [D&C 8]," 45, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-april-1829-b-dc-8/1>. Handwriting of John Whitmer. Courtesy Church History Library.

to "Translate all those ancient Records which have been hid up which are Sacred."²³

It is little wonder, then, that John Whitmer, in his manuscript copy of this revelation, hesitated on whether to describe Oliver's gift as one of "revelation" or "translation." This ambivalence is captured in a revealing strikethrough (fig. 1): "A Revelation to Oliver [Cowdery] he being desirous to know whether the Lord would grant him the gift of Revelation & thth Translation given in Harmony Susquehannah Pennsylvania April 1829."²⁴

Translation as Power (section 20)

The "Articles and Covenants" of the young Church of Christ, now section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants, provides one of the earliest accounts of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and underscores the conceptual equivalence of translation and revelation in early Latter-day Saint thought. The earliest canonical account prepared by Joseph Smith reads:

After it was truly manifested unto this first elder that he had received a remission of his sins he was entangled again in the vanities of the world;

23. "Revelation, April 1829-B [D&C 8]," in MacKay, and others, eds., *Documents, Volume 1*, 46–47, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-april-1829-b-dc-8/1#facts>.

24. "Revelation, April 1829-B [D&C 8]," 45, spelling original; compare *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835), 161.

but after repenting, and humbling himself, sincerely, through faith God ministered unto him by an holy angel whose countenance was as lightning, and whose garments were pure and white above all other whiteness, and gave unto him commandments [*sic*] which inspired him, and *gave him power from on high*, by the means which were before prepared, to translate the book of Mormon, which contains a record of a fallen people, and the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, and to the Jews also, which was given by inspiration, and is confirmed to others by the ministering of angels, and is declared unto the world by them, proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true, and that God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age and generation, as well as in generations of old, thereby showing that he is the same God yesterday, to-day, and forever.—Amen.²⁵

This significant passage from the 1835 edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants* encapsulates the dynamic discussed above. It describes Joseph receiving “power from on high, by the means which were before prepared”—a reference to the translation instruments—to translate the *Book of Mormon*. The passage further characterizes the “record of a fallen people” as being “given by inspiration.” It speaks of the ministering of angels, including the angel who revealed himself to Joseph Smith and others who confirm and declare the book. According to this text, the revelatory power tied to Joseph’s seeric office is bidirectional. It flows inwardly, giving Joseph power to produce the book of scripture, and outwardly, impacting those who read it “by the ministering of angels . . . proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true, and that God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age and generation, as well as in generations of old, [and] thereby showing that he is the same God yesterday, today, and forever” (*D&C* 20:10–12).

Early Public Perceptions of Translation as Revelation

The reaction of Joseph Smith’s contemporaries to his claims reveals that he was not alone in conceptually merging the phenomena of receiving new revelation and translating an ancient book. In an 1830 letter, minister Diedrich Willers, who was familiar with the Whitmer family through their membership in the German Reformed Church, articulated an important early understanding of the bold claims made by the young seer:

25. *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835), 77, emphasis added. See also current *Doctrine and Covenants* 20:5–12.

The Angel indicated that the Lord destined him to translate these things into English from the ancient language, that under these plates were hidden spectacles, without which he could not translate these plates, that by using these spectacles, he (Smith) would be in a position to read these ancient languages, which he had never studied, *and that the Holy Ghost would reveal to him the translation in the English language*. Therefore, he (Smith) proceeded to Manchester township, Ontario County, and found everything as described, the plates buried next to the spectacles in the earth, and soon he completed the translation of this work.²⁶

That same year, the *Observer and Telegraph*, based in Hudson, Ohio, reported the missionary efforts of Oliver Cowdery and other Latter-day Saint missionaries in the area. A correspondent identified as “A. S.” wrote, “They are preaching and teaching a species of Religion we are not all prepared to embrace.”²⁷ The report continued: “These men have brought with them copies of a Book, known in this region by the name of the ‘Golden Bible,’ or, as it is learned on its title-page, ‘The Book of Mormon.’ They solemnly affirm, that its contents were given by Divine inspiration.” According to the report, Cowdery and his companions preached that “in or near the township of Palmyra, Ontario Co. N. Y. . . . an Angel appeared to a certain Joseph Smith residing in that place, who, they say, was a poor, ignorant, illiterate man, and made no pretensions to religion of any kind. . . . They affirm that the said Smith obeyed the heavenly messenger, when lo! a new Revelation—the Golden Bible was discovered!” The writer then summarized Cowdery’s account of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

Although a secondhand report that viewed this new “species of Religion” as delusional and blasphemous, requiring swift action to stem its spread, the language in the description (apart from its editorial skepticism) aligns with accounts from Latter-day Saint sources, including those from Joseph Smith himself. This consistency lends reliability to the report as a reflection of how early Latter-day Saints conceptualized and described the Book of Mormon to others.

According to the narrative given by one of these disciples—Oliver Cowdery—at their late exhibition in Kirtland, this pretended Revelation

26. “Diedrich Willers’s Letter to Rev. L. Mayer and D. Young, June 18, 1830, Extract,” in Morris, *Documentary History of the Book of Mormon*, 404–5, emphasis added. See also D. Michael Quinn, trans. and ed., “The First Months of Mormonism: A Contemporary View by Rev. Diedrich Willers,” *New York History* 54, no. 3 (July 1973): 317–33.

27. “*Observer and Telegraph* Articles, November 18, 1830,” in Morris, *Documentary History of the Book of Mormon*, 385.

was written on golden plates, or something resembling golden plates, of the thickness of tin—7 inches in length, 6 inches in breadth, and a pile about 6 inches deep. None among the most learned in the United States could read, and interpret the hand-writing, (save one, and he could decipher but a few lines correctly,) excepting this ignoramus, Joseph Smith, Jr. To him, they say, was given the spirit of interpretation; but he was ignorant of the art of writing, he employed this Oliver Cowdery and others to write, while he read, interpreted, and translated this mighty Revelation.²⁸

Throughout the report, the *Observer and Telegraph*'s informant emphasizes how Oliver Cowdery and his fellow missionaries described the Book of Mormon as a "new Revelation," or a "Divine Revelation," given by "Divine inspiration."²⁹ They affirmed that "its contents were . . . written by prophets of the Most High from a period of 600 years before, to that of some hundred years after our blessed Saviour's advent" and had been "deposited by Divine command below the surface of the ground."³⁰ Furthermore, as summarized by the report, "This new Revelation, they say is especially designed for the benefit, or rather for the christianizing of the Aborigines of America; who, as they affirm, are a part of the tribe of Manasseh, and whose ancestors landed on the coast of Chili 600 years before the coming of Christ, and from them descended all the Indians of America."³¹ This account offers a valuable glimpse into how the earliest Latter-day Saint missionaries—including Oliver Cowdery who helped produce the book—presented the Book of Mormon to the public: an ancient record written by divinely inspired prophets, revealed through a modern prophet, and translated by the power of revelation.

The disenchanted Ezra Booth, writing in November 1831, offered another early (albeit openly hostile) depiction of Latter-day Saint beliefs about the Book of Mormon by attributing the following declaration to a stereotypical "Mormonite" missionary: "The Book of Mormon which I hold in my hand, is a Divine Revalation [sic], and the very thing we need, to burst the cloud and remove the darkness, which has long surrounded the mysterious and degraded aborigines [of America]."³²

28. "Observer and Telegraph Articles, November 18, 1830," 385.

29. "Observer and Telegraph Articles, November 18, 1830," 386.

30. "Observer and Telegraph Articles, November 18, 1830," 385.

31. "Observer and Telegraph Articles, November 18, 1830," 386.

32. Ezra Booth, "Mormonism No. VIII," *Painesville (Ohio) Telegraph*, December 20, 1831, [image 2], Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/28359d83-66f6-49df-929c-0bf99e8339>

Booth's portrayal of this missionary's declaration aligns with other contemporary accounts, confirming it was not mere caricature.

For example, John Whitmer, one of the Eight Witnesses, testified in 1830 that he had personally handled "as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated."³³ Six years after this declaration, Whitmer comfortably used "revelation" to describe the book. In an 1836 editorial, he expressed "no hesitancy" in declaring that the Book of Mormon was "a revelation from God" and affirmed that he could "with all confidence . . . [sign his] name to it as such."³⁴

Another early convert, Harrison Burgess, recalled being convinced of the Book of Mormon's divine origin after hearing Simeon Carter preach in July 1832. Yet, the following spring, Burgess experienced a crisis of faith, writing that his "mind became perplexed and darkened" and that he was "so tormented in spirit" that he retreated into the woods to pray. During this anguished moment, Burgess recounted that "a glorious personage clothed in white stood before me and exhibited to my view the plates, from which the Book of Mormon was taken." Reassured of the Book of Mormon's authenticity, Burgess's faith was renewed.³⁵

Joseph's claim to have translated the Book of Mormon through divine revelation led other early readers to use the terms *translation* and *revelation* almost interchangeably when describing the book. Phineas Young's recollection of his first encounter with the Book of Mormon stresses this point. Young recounted:

In April, 1830, having received the Book of Mormon, as I was on my way home from the town of Lima, where I had been to preach, I stopped at the house of a man by the name of Tomlinson, to get some dinner. While engaged in conversation with the family, a young man came in, and walking across the room to where I was sitting, held a book towards me,

63/0/1; E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* [. . .] (Painesville, Ohio, 1834), 210–11. See also H. Michael Marquardt, "Ezra Booth on Early Mormonism: A Look at His 1831 Letters," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 28 (2008): 65–87.

33. "Appendix 5: Testimony of Eight Witnesses, Late June 1829," in MacKay, and others, eds., *Documents, Volume 1*, 387, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-5-testimony-of-eight-witnesses-late-june-1829/1#facts>.

34. John Whitmer, "Address," *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, March 1836, 286, Mormon Publications: 19th and 20th Centuries, Digital Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, accessed October 13, 2025, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/9754/rec/2>.

35. Harrison Burgess, "A Short Sketch of the Life of Harrison Burgess, son of William and Violaty Burgess," 1–2 [images 4–5], Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/dfab06d0-8973-4207-8299-1c7e874feeb9/0/0>.

saying,—“There is a book, sir, I wish you to read.” The thing appeared so novel to me that for a moment I hesitated, saying,—“Pray, sir, what book have you?” “The Book of Mormon, or, as it is called by some, the Golden Bible.” “Ah, sir, then it purports to be a revelation.” “Yes,” said he, “it is a revelation from God.” I took the book, and by his request looked at the testimony of the witnesses. Said he, “If you will read this book with a prayerful heart, and ask God to give you a witness, you will know of the truth of this work.” I told him I would do so, and then asked him his name. He said his name was Samuel H. Smith. “Ah,” said I, “you are one of the witnesses.” “Yes,” said he, “I know the book to be a revelation from God, translated by the gift and power of the Holy Ghost, and that my brother Joseph Smith, jun., is a Prophet, Seer and Revelator.”³⁶

By his own account, Phineas Young, after reading the Book of Mormon and receiving a divine witness of its truth, publicly affirmed to an eager crowd “that [the Book of Mormon] was a revelation from God, translated from the Reformed Egyptian language by Joseph Smith, jun., by the gift and power of God.”³⁷ Young’s testimony demonstrates how closely the concepts of revelation and translation were linked in the early Latter-day Saint religious lexicon.

A final example worth considering here is Orson Pratt, an Apostle and prominent early Latter-day Saint thinker. Pratt produced extensive writings on the Book of Mormon, making him a representative orthodox figure for this discussion. A few examples from his work illustrate his interchangeable use of the terms *translation* and *revelation* in describing the book’s origins. In his 1848 pamphlet *Divine Authority*, Pratt affirmed Joseph Smith’s account of “the finding and translation of the Book of Mormon,” stating that it was accomplished “through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, by aid of the Urim and Thummim.”³⁸ Citing Isaiah 29:11–12, Pratt avowed how “there is no circumstance mentioned by Isaiah, connected with the revelation and translation of the book he mentions, but what is connected with the Book of Mormon.”³⁹ Elsewhere, Pratt spoke of “the revelation of the record of Joseph,”⁴⁰ of

36. “History of Brigham Young,” *The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star* 25, no. 23 (June 6, 1863): 360–61, Digital Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/7598>.

37. “History of Brigham Young,” 361.

38. Orson Pratt, *Divine Authority; or the Question, Was Joseph Smith Sent of God?* (Liverpool, 1848), 8.

39. Pratt, *Divine Authority*, 11.

40. Pratt, *Divine Authority*, 7.

Moroni “reveal[ing] a book containing a beautiful and glorious system of salvation,”⁴¹ and the plates’ “translation by the gift of God.”⁴² Throughout *Divine Authority*, Pratt consistently describes Joseph Smith as having translated the record while also referring to the Book of Mormon as a revelation, freely interchanging the two terms.

Pratt reinforced this dual language in his 1850 publication *Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*. It opens: “The Book of Mormon claims to be a divinely inspired record, written by a succession of prophets who inhabited Ancient America. It professes to be revealed to the present generation for the salvation of all who will receive it, and for the overthrow and damnation of all nations who reject it.”⁴³ Throughout the rest of *Divine Authenticity*, Pratt alternates between the terms *revealed*, *revelation*, *translate*, and *translated*, leaving readers with the clear impression that Joseph Smith “translated this record into the English language” and that “the Book of Mormon is a divine revelation, because God has confirmed the same unto them by the miraculous manifestations of his power.”⁴⁴

Pratt maintained this language in *The Seer* (1853), where he asked, “Do you believe the Book of Mormon is a divine revelation?” and answered simply, “We do.”⁴⁵ Whether Pratt meant the content or teachings of the Book of Mormon were revelatory or that the book was received by revelation, that he felt comfortable using this term to describe the text at all is significant. A year later, he again referred to “the revelation and translation of the Book of Mormon” and warned that those who did not “embrace the Book of Mormon as a divine revelation” would stand condemned before God.⁴⁶ His writings thus exemplify how early Latter-day Saints blurred the distinction between *translation* and *revelation*, viewing them as interconnected in Joseph Smith’s process of bringing forth the Book of Mormon.

These examples align well with Joseph Smith’s own 1843 statement to James Arlington Bennet, previously quoted by Elder Soares, where Joseph succinctly encapsulates and illustrates this conceptual overlap. “The fact is,” Joseph wrote, “that by the power of God I translated the

41. Pratt, *Divine Authority*, 4.

42. Pratt, *Divine Authority*, 16.

43. Pratt, *Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*, 1.

44. Pratt, *Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*, 49, 78; see also pp. 50, 55, 57, 63, 68.

45. Orson Pratt, *The Seer* (Eborn Books, 1990), 30.

46. Pratt, *Seer*, 213, 215.

book of Mormon hieroglyphics from hieroglyphics; the knowledge of which was lost to the world. In which wonderful event," he continued, "I stood alone, an unlearned youth, to combat the worldly wisdom and multiplied ignorance of eighteen centuries. *[sic]* with a new revelation."⁴⁷

The Translation of the Book of Abraham

The book of Abraham is another relevant Joseph Smith translation project, begun in the summer of 1835 and published in the spring of 1842. As with the Book of Mormon, the Prophet unfortunately left fewer details about the precise method of this translation than we might hope. Consequently, "no known first-person account from Joseph Smith exists to explain the translation of the Book of Abraham, and the scribes who worked on the project and others who claimed knowledge of the process provided only vague or general reminiscences."⁴⁸ However, what is clear is that Joseph repeatedly referred to his work with the Egyptian papyri and the resulting text of the book of Abraham as a "translation."⁴⁹ For example, the heading that introduced the first published installment of the text identified it as "A TRANSLATION Of some ancient Records."⁵⁰ Furthermore, an unpublished editorial comment from Joseph, presumably intended to accompany the publication, promised that he would "contin[u]e to translate & publish [the book of Abraham] as fast as possible till the whole is completed."⁵¹

47. "Letter to James Arlington Bennet, 13 November 1843," 261.

48. Robin Scott Jensen and Brian M. Hauglid, ed., *Revelations and Translations, Volume 4: Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts*, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2018), xxiii.

49. See the entries in Joseph Smith's 1835 journal on the following dates: October 7, November 19, 20, 24, and 25. Joseph Smith, "Journal, 1835–1836," in *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2008), 71, 107, 109–10, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1835-1836/8>; see entry for March 8, 1842, in "Journal, December 1841–December 1842," in *Journals, Volume 2: December 1841–April 1843*, ed. Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Richard Lloyd Anderson, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2011), 42, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1841-december-1842/20>.

50. "Times and Seasons, 1 March 1842," 704, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed June 21, 2025, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-1-march-1842/2>.

51. "Editorial, circa 1 March 1842, Draft," in Smith, and others, eds., *Documents, Volume 9*, 207, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/editorial-circa-1-march-1842-draft/1>.

Complicating matters somewhat is the fact that shortly after the publication of the book of Abraham, Latter-day Saints and others were referring to it as a revelation rather than a translation. In September 1842, not six months after the publication of the book of Abraham, an editorial published in the *Times and Seasons* under Joseph Smith's editorial supervision freely employed this language. "If we believe in present *revelation*," the editorial read, referring to the book of Abraham, "as published in the *Times and Seasons* last spring, Abraham, the prophet of the Lord, was laid upon the iron bedstead for slaughter."⁵²

Similarly, non-Latter-day Saint readers—whether skeptical or sympathetic—described the book of Abraham using both terms. One month after the *book of Abraham*'s publication, the *Telegraph* in Southport, Wisconsin, announced, "Joe Smith, the prophet of Nauvoo has recently translated into the English language a new revelation of the Mormon faith. This new revelation is called the Book of Abraham, which Joe pretends was found among the catacombs of Egypt."⁵³

That same month, James Gordon Bennett republished the opening text of the book of Abraham and Facsimile 1 in the *New York Herald*, observing, "The Prophet of Nauvoo has given the chapter, and it is set down as a revelation among the Mormons."⁵⁴ Joseph Smith was pleased enough with Bennett's description to have it republished in the Church's newspaper the following month.⁵⁵ Finally, in May 1842, the same month that *Times and Seasons* published the final installment of the book of Abraham,⁵⁶ the *Churchman* newspaper out of New York described being shown "a printed order or revelation of the prophet, which was a sort of

52. "Selections from Times and Seasons, 1 September 1842," in *Documents, Volume 11: September 1842–February 1843*, ed. Spencer W. McBride, Jeffrey D. Mahas, Brett D. Dowdle, and Tyson Reeder, *Joseph Smith Papers* (Church Historian's Press, 2020), 23, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-1-september-1842/8>, emphasis added.

53. "Article clipped from The Telegraph-Courier," April 26, 1842, Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-telegraph-courier/82494293/>, emphasis original.

54. "The Mormons—a Leaf from Joe Smith," *New York Herald*, April 3, 1842, [2], Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn83030313/1842-04-03/ed-1/?sp=2>; reprinted in *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 13 (May 2, 1842): 767–82, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-2-may-1842/7>.

55. "Times and Seasons, 2 May 1842," 773–74.

56. "Book of Abraham and Facsimiles, 1 March–16 May 1842," in *Revelations and Translations, Volume 4: Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts*, ed. Robin Scott Jensen and Brian M. Hauglid, *Joseph Smith Papers* (Church Historian's Press, 2018), 303–27, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-abraham-and-facsimiles-1-march-16-may-1842/10>.

hieroglyphic, with a brief explanation and application subjoined," referring to the book of Abraham facsimiles.⁵⁷

Where the Prophet left gaps in the documentary record, his clerks and other contemporaries help fill in some details, their statements providing insight into how the book of Abraham was understood and conceptualized. William W. Phelps, who was involved in the production of the book of Abraham and the associated Egyptian language project, shared his perspective in a letter to his wife Sally written shortly after the acquisition of the papyri. Phelps wrote, "As no one could translate these writings, they were presented to President Smith. He soon knew what they were and said that the rolls of papyrus contained a sacred record kept by Joseph in Pharaoh's court in Egypt and the teachings of Father Abraham." To Phelps, Joseph's translation of the Egyptian records was compelling evidence that "there is nothing secret or hidden that shall not be revealed" to the Saints.⁵⁸ John Whitmer, in his history written primarily between 1835 and 1838, similarly recounted the recovery of the papyri and the translation of the book of Abraham. He described how "Joseph the Seer saw these Record[s] and by the revelation of Jesus Christ could translate these records. . . . Which when all translated will be a pleasing history and of great value to the saints."⁵⁹

After his disillusionment with Joseph Smith and the Church, Warren Parrish, a scribe involved in the production of the book of Abraham, wrote a scathing letter to the *Painesville Republican* in 1838. In the course of complaining against his former faith, Parrish recalled that he had "set by [Joseph's] side and penned down the translation of the Egyptian Hieroglyphicks as he claimed to receive it by direct inspiration of Heaven."⁶⁰ Similar language appears in Josiah Quincy's 1883 account of his meeting with Joseph in Nauvoo, where Joseph reportedly assured him that he

57. "The Churchman Newspaper Publishes Secondhand Account of the Greek Psalter Incident [*The Churchman* (New York), May 21, 1842, 42]," B. H. Roberts Foundation, accessed August 22, 2025, https://bhroberts.org/records/0Y5sG9-FMFXRd/the_churchman_newspaper_publishes_secondhand_account_of_the_greek_psalter_incident.

58. Journal History of the Church, July 20, 1835, 1–2, Church History Library, microfilm copy in Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/19f871d7-9f8b-414b-9a93-2fae5e62e8cd/0/518>.

59. "John Whitmer, History, 1831–circa 1847," in *Histories, Volume 2: Assigned Histories, 1831–1847*, ed. Karen Lynn Davidson, Richard L. Jensen, and David J. Whittaker, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2012), 86, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/john-whitmer-history-1831-circa-1847/80>.

60. Warren Parrish, letter to the editor, February 5, 1838, "Mormonism," *Painesville (Ohio) Republican*, February 15, 1838, [3].

“was the only mortal who could translate these mysterious writings [on the papyri], and that his power was given by direct inspiration.”⁶¹

The descriptions offered by Parrish and Quincy of Joseph invoking “direct inspiration” in the translation of the book of Abraham intriguingly echo Oliver Cowdery’s 1834 account of the Book of Mormon translation process, suggesting a similar understanding of how the two texts were produced. Cowdery wrote, “These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the *inspiration* of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom! Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he translated, with the *Urim* and *Thummim*, or, as the Nephites would have said, ‘Interpreters,’ the history or record called ‘The book of Mormon.’”⁶²

Another clerk involved in the publication of the book of Abraham in early 1842, Wilford Woodruff, was even more explicit in his reflections. While assisting with the first installment of book of Abraham text for the *Times and Seasons*, he wrote, “The Lord is Blessing Joseph with power to reveal the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” He continued, marveling that God had given Joseph the ability “to translate through the Urim & Thummim Ancient records and Hieroglyphics as old as Abraham or Adam.” This deeply impressed Woodruff, who, using language familiar to modern Latter-day Saints, observed that reading the book of Abraham “cause[d] our hearts to burn within us while we behold their glorious truths opened unto us.” Referring to Joseph by the title also favored by John Whitmer, Woodruff rejoiced that “Joseph the Seer has presented us some of the Book of Abraham which was written by his own hand but hid from the knowledge of man for the last four thousand years but has now come to light through the mercy of God.” He concluded, “I am convinced for myself. that none of the Prophets Seers or Revelators of the Earth haven ever accomplished a greater work than will be accomplished in the Last days through the mercy of God By JOSEPH THE SEER.”⁶³ After the first two installments of the text were published, Woodruff again

61. Josiah Quincy, *Figures of the Past from the Leaves of Old Journals* (Roberts Brothers, 1883), 387, emphasis original, <https://archive.org/details/figuresofpastfro01quin/page/386/mode/2up>.

62. Oliver Cowdery, *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, October 1834, 14, emphasis original, <https://archive.org/details/latterdaysaintsm01unse/page/14/mode/2up>.

63. Wilford Woodruff, “Journal (January 1, 1841–December 31, 1842),” February 19, 1842, Wilford Woodruff Papers, accessed June 30, 2025, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/163>.

exulted in his journal, declaring that “the truths of the Book of Abraham are truly edifying great & glorious which are among the rich treasures that are revealed unto us in the last days.”⁶⁴

Orson Pratt also described the translation of the book of Abraham using both *revelation* and *translation* as key terms. In an 1859 reminiscence, Pratt recalled witnessing Joseph Smith’s “countenance lighted up as the inspiration of the Holy Ghost rested upon him” during his revelatory pronouncements. Specifically, Pratt remembered observing Joseph “translating, by inspiration, the Old and New Testaments, and the inspired book of Abraham from Egyptian papyrus.”⁶⁵ In another discourse that same year, addressing the primeval antiquity of the gospel, Pratt again employed this terminology to describe Joseph’s translation of the papyrus:

These extracts [from the book of Moses] which I have read concerning Adam, Enoch, and Noah you will find in a little work called “*The Pearl of Great Price*,” published by F. D. Richards, in England, a few years ago [1851]. We might go on and read further extracts from the Book of Abraham—a book also revealed by inspiration to the Prophet Joseph Smith, showing that the Gospel was revealed to him, and how he received the promise that all the children of men that would obey that same Gospel preached by him should be justified and become his children—called his seed, and heirs according to the promise. But I have read sufficient for the information of the Latter-day Saints upon this subject.⁶⁶

Twenty years later, after overseeing the preparation of the second edition of the Pearl of Great Price for publication in Utah,⁶⁷ Pratt explicitly compared the translation of the book of Abraham to that of the Book of Mormon. Once again, he invoked the language of inspiration and

64. Woodruff, “Journal (January 1, 1841–December 31, 1842),” **March 19, 1842**.

65. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool, 1855–86), 7:176 (July 10, 1859).

66. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 7:253 (September 11, 1859). The first edition of the Pearl of Great Price can be found on the Church History Library website. Joseph Smith, *The Pearl of Great price: Being a Choice Selection [. . .]* (Liverpool, 1851), <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/777118c9-9529-4cb1-823d-36833959eclf/0/26>.

67. *The Pearl of Great Price: Being a Choice Selection from the Revelations, Translations, and Narrations of Joseph Smith, First Prophet, Seer, and Revelator to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* (Latter-day Saints’ Printing and Publishing Establishment, 1878). See Kenneth W. Baldridge, “Pearl of Great Price, Contents and Publication,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (Macmillan, 1992), 3:1071–72; Terryl Givens with Brian M. Hauglid, *The Pearl of Greatest Price: Mormonism’s Most Controversial Scripture* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 1–3, 20–22.

revelation to describe both processes. Describing Joseph Smith, Pratt wrote:

Notwithstanding his youth and inexperience in regard to the learning and wisdom of the world, he proved himself a great and mighty man of God; he not only was the instrument in the hands of God of bringing to light the Book of Mormon, but also received numerous other revelations which are contained in this book called the Doctrine and Covenants, a book that contains nearly as much reading matter as the Book of Mormon; and besides these you will find that many of the revelations were given by him which are found in what is called the new edition of the Pearl of Great Price, published by the *Deseret News* Office.⁶⁸

With the book of Abraham included in the new edition of the Pearl of Great Price, Pratt recounted its translation for his listeners. After detailing its discovery, Pratt concluded emphatically, “The Prophet translated the part of these writings which, as I have said is contained in the Pearl of Great Price, and known as the Book of Abraham. Thus you see one of the first gifts bestowed by the Lord for the benefit of His people, was that of revelation—the gift to translate, by the aid of the Urim and Thummim, the gift of bringing to light old and ancient records.”⁶⁹ It is little wonder, then, that earlier in an 1853 discussion of the book of Abraham’s theology of the premortal existence, Pratt revered the text as part of “those ancient revelations which have been revealed anew through Joseph the Seer.”⁷⁰

The early Latter-day Saints’ understanding of Joseph Smith’s seeric abilities is further confirmed by sources describing his use of the “Urim and Thummim” (probably one of his personal seer stones) in the translation process.⁷¹ As early as one month after the acquisition and initial translation of the papyri in July 1835, reports began to circulate about Joseph employing these instruments. The *Cleveland Whig* reported in August 1835 that it was “credibly informed” by Frederick G. Williams (or possibly William W. Phelps⁷²) that “the Mormons have purchased of Mr. Chandler, three of the mummies, which he recently exhibited in this

68. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 20:64 (August 25, 1878).

69. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 20:65 (August 25, 1878).

70. Orson Pratt, “The Pre-Existence of Man,” *Seer* 1, no. 4 (April 1853): 51.

71. See Stephen O. Smoot, “Did Joseph Smith Use a Seer Stone in the Translation of the Book of Abraham?” *Religious Educator* 23, no. 2 (2022): 64–107.

72. Mackay and Frederick, *Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones*, 127, identify the *Cleveland Whig*’s source as Phelps, even though the paper itself names “Williams” (meaningly most likely Frederick G. Williams, who, like Phelps, also assisted in the translation of the papyri).

village; and that the prophet Joe has ascertained, by examining the papyrus through his spectacles, that they are the bodies of *Joseph* (the son of Abraham,) and King Abimeleck, and his daughter."⁷³ Similarly, in 1842, Apostle Parley P. Pratt wrote to English readers of the *Millennial Star* that "the record is now in course of translation by means of the Urim and Thummim, and proves to be a record written partly by the father of the faithful, Abraham, and finished by Joseph when in Egypt."⁷⁴ Howard Coray, another of Joseph's Nauvoo clerks, later reminisced to his daughter Martha in 1889 about hearing Joseph "prophesy many things that have already come to pass" and also "translate by the Seer's stone,"⁷⁵ most likely referring to the book of Abraham.⁷⁶

Other sources suggest that Joseph used the seer stone to translate the book of Abraham in a manner comparable to how he translated the Book of Mormon. Lucy Mack Smith reportedly told a Quaker visitor to Nauvoo in 1846 that "when Joseph was reading the papyrus, he closed his eyes, and held a hat over his face, and that the revelation came to him; and that where the papyrus was torn, he could read the parts that were destroyed equally as well as those that were there; and that scribes sat by him writing, as he expounded."⁷⁷ Similar accounts appear in earlier and later sources. William West, writing in 1837 after his visit to the Saints in Kirtland, described the process as follows: "These records were torn by being taken from the roll of embalming salve which contained them, and some parts entirely lost; but Smith is to translate the whole by divine inspiration, and that which is lost, like Nebuchadnezzar's dream, can be interpreted as well as that which is preserved."⁷⁸ Likewise, Frederic Mather in 1880 recorded a similar claim that "Joe Smith translated

73. "Another Humbug," *The Cleveland Whig*, August 5, 1835, 1, emphasis in original.

74. Parley P. Pratt, "Editorial Remarks," *Millennial Star* 3, no. 3 (July 1842): 47, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/6350bd5e-05e9-46a7-8281-86b336ed4558/0/14>.

75. Howard Coray to Martha Jane Lewis, August 2, 1889, image 4, holograph, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/becd2d14-e7c0-4aa8-b70d-26861581916f/0/3>.

76. See the discussion in Smoot, "Did Joseph Smith Use a Seer Stone?" 86–87.

77. M., "Correspondence of the Friends' Weekly Intelligencer," *Friends' Weekly Intelligencer* (Philadelphia), October 3, 1846, 211, https://archive.org/details/sim_friends-in-telligencer_1846-10-03_3_27/page/n1/mode/2up.

78. "William West Describes the 'Four Mummies' and 'Quantity of Records' [William West, *A Few Interesting Facts Respecting the Rise Progress and Pretensions of the Mormons* (n.p., 1837), 5]," B. H. Roberts Foundation, accessed October 13, 2025, https://bhroberts.org/records/0ueBOW-9pbnhc/william_west_describes_the_four_mummies_and_quantity_of_records.

the characters on the roll [of papyrus], being favored with a ‘special revelation’ whenever any of the characters were missing by reason of the mutilation of the roll.”⁷⁹

While these testimonies warrant a degree of caution, they align with accounts from those close to Joseph Smith who reported his use of a seer stone in the translation of the book of Abraham. Whatever else, these sources suggest that contemporaries understood revelation and translation as interwoven activities in Joseph’s study of the Egyptian papyri. Just as in his translation of the Nephite gold plates, the Prophet’s translation of the Egyptian papyri thus subsumed both concepts under the broader category of seership—a gift uniquely bestowed upon him by God.

Conclusion

A comprehensive diachronic analysis of the terms *translation*, *inspiration*, and *revelation* as used by Latter-day Saints to describe Joseph Smith’s scriptural texts is beyond the scope of this article. My survey of the historical record has focused primarily on the earliest decades of these texts’ reception. It would not be surprising to find certain phrases prevailing in the Latter-day Saint religious lexicon during specific periods or contexts; nor would it be surprising to find variation among different Latter-day Saint thinkers, writers, and leaders. However, a thorough examination of this would require a book-length study. In the meantime, I have presented strong evidence from Joseph Smith and early readers of his scriptural texts—both believers and skeptics—to substantiate the main argument of this paper and lay the groundwork for further study. A few concluding observations will suffice to bring this discussion to a close.

For early Latter-day Saints, including Joseph Smith, the translation of ancient scripture was understood as a divine gift and power bestowed by God upon those called as seers. This principle is explicitly taught in the Book of Mormon (see Mosiah 8:13–18) and, according to Joseph’s history, was affirmed by the angel during his inaugural visit on the night of September 21, 1823 (JS-H 1:34–35). Joseph’s repeated declaration that he “translated” the Book of Mormon “by the gift and power of God,” (though less descriptive than we might prefer) aligns with and is illuminated by the early revelations surrounding the book’s production. These revelations clarify that Joseph’s gift and the power he received involved

79. Frederic G. Mather, “Early Days of Mormonism,” *Lippincott’s Magazine* 26, no. 152 (August 1880): 211, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/24851/24851-page-images/p211.png>.

the ability to use the Urim and Thummim or the seer stone in a process that combined revelation and translation into a single miraculous outpouring.⁸⁰

From this, we see that nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints, much like those in the twenty-first century, did not impose rigid terminological boundaries on Joseph Smith's scriptural productions. His roles as "a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ, [and] an elder of the church" (D&C 21:1) were not strictly compartmentalized by his early followers. Orson Pratt, for example, spoke of Joseph Smith's "gift of translation by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost." In his view, this gift enabled Joseph to

translate the Scriptures, and to reveal some of the lost books; such as, the prophecy of Enoch, the Book of Abraham, the Revelation to Moses, not included in the five books called the Pentateuch, and some other revelations not now in the Bible. By this great gift of the Spirit, he translated the Book of Mormon from the original language of the ancient inhabitants of America—a language entirely unknown to human wisdom at the present day. By this gift, he translated the Book of Abraham from Egyptian papyrus, taken out of the catacombs of Egypt. By this gift, he translated from parchment a sacred revelation concerning the Apostle John and his great mission to "prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings." (See Revelation x. 11.)⁸¹

All of this follows naturally from Pratt's logic that "the Spirit is perfectly acquainted with every language and tongue upon the earth" and can therefore "speak words and sentences in an unknown tongue" as well as "speak the words of a new revelation."⁸²

This merging of concepts is also evident in the writings of William Appleby, whose reflections further illustrate how closely revelation and translation were intertwined in the early Latter-day Saint worldview. In 1856, Appleby wrote to Apostle John Taylor for publication in

80. See further Christopher James Blythe, "'By the Gift and Power of God': Translation Among the Gifts of the Spirit," in *Producing Ancient Scripture: Joseph Smith's Translation Projects in the Development of Mormon Christianity*, ed. Michael Hubbard MacKay, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Brian M. Hauglid (University of Utah Press, 2020), 27–53. He argues that the revelatory translation of scripture in early Latter-day Saint thinking was understood to be a gift of the Spirit.

81. Orson Pratt, *Spiritual Gifts* (n.p.: December 1856), 71, Mormon Publications: 19th and 20th Centuries, accessed October 13, 2025, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digitalcollection/NCMP1820-1846/id/14711>.

82. Pratt, *Spiritual Gifts*, 72.

Taylor's New York-based newspaper, *The Mormon*. In his letter, Appleby expounded extensively on the corruption and restoration of scriptural texts and their significance to the faith of the Latter-day Saints.⁸³ After discussing the history and transmission of the Bible and other ancient records, as well as Joseph Smith's prophetic role in restoring lost truths, Appleby concluded his treatment with the following:

But thanks and praise be given to Him who rules on high and sways the destinies of men; He has spoken from the heavens in these days, raised up a Prophet, Seer and Revelator, who has, by commandment and the aid of the Urim and Thummim, and the power of inspiration, translated and brought back and restored "*the most plain and precious things*" that have been taken away by uninspired men, under the authority of a corrupt and apostate church, so that the Saints of Latter Days know, understand and comprehend truth from error, and the inspiration of the Almighty from the wisdom of men.⁸⁴

The pronouncements of Orson Pratt and William Appleby anticipated Elder Soares's 2020 general conference address by nearly one hundred and fifty years. This reflects an indisputably long and consistent pattern in Latter-day Saint religious discourse of using the terms *revelation* (and related words like *inspiration*) and *translation* practically interchangeably when describing Joseph Smith's scriptural productions—a pattern particularly evident in discussions of both the Book of Mormon and the book of Abraham.⁸⁵

On a final note, lest there be any lingering confusion, it is important to emphasize that this terminological fluidity does *not* suggest a strategic retreat from the authenticity of Joseph Smith's scriptural productions. There is no evidence to indicate that Latter-day Saint leaders—from Orson Pratt and Wilford Woodruff to their modern successors—have

83. William I. Appleby, "Correspondence of Judge Appleby," *The Mormon* (New York), November 8, 1856, 3, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/08753165-2138-4f99-b16f-a78b3d1efce8/0/2>; compare William I. Appleby, "Translations of the Bible," *Millennial Star* 18, no. 51 (December 20, 1856): 801–4.

84. Appleby, "Correspondence of Judge Appleby," 3, emphasis original.

85. One final example of a Latter-day Saint describing the Book of Mormon as a revelation can be found in an August 1904 article by John Henry Evans in the *Improvement Era*, the Church's official publication from 1897 to 1970. "As to the nature of the first vision and the *revelation* of the Book of Mormon . . .," wrote Evans, "there is nothing in Scripture or reason from which it could plausibly be inferred that such things as revelations and visions are impossible or improbable. On the contrary, there are many things which indicate that these are intended as a special privilege of men." J. H. Evans, "Seeing, They See Not," *Improvement Era* 7, no. 10 (August 1904): 756, emphasis added.

sometimes described Joseph Smith's translations of ancient scripture as revelations out of deference to critics or bashful concession that they lack historicity. On the contrary, the Latter-day Saint apologetic tradition has consistently offered a robust and spirited defense of the historicity and divine inspiration of both the Book of Mormon and the book of Abraham.⁸⁶ In the case of the book of Abraham, it may be observed that Church leaders have recently shown greater openness to questions about the manner of its translation, but this is far from conceding to critics seeking to discredit its ancient authenticity.⁸⁷

The sources reviewed here are unequivocal: While these texts were often described as revelations, such descriptions were never meant to deny their status as ancient records. Recognizing this is essential for accurately understanding Joseph Smith's view of his scriptural texts, how Latter-day Saints have historically conceptualized Restoration scripture, and how that understanding has endured.

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86. See Stephen O. Smoot, "From the Catecombs of Egypt: Latter-day Saint Engagement with Ancient Egypt and the Contest of Religious Identity," *Journal of Mormon History* 46, no. 4 (2020): 1–44; Stephen O. Smoot, "Apologetics and Antiquity: Book of Mormon Reception, 1830–1844," *Journal of Mormon History* 48, no. 4 (2022): 1–31.

87. Smoot, "From the Catecombs of Egypt," 41–42.

Sage

Isn't there supposed to be
a sage at the summit,
perched on the peak,
meek and wise
with eyes that see through time
and pithy words
to make it worth the climb?

But there is only rock, and wind, and quiet.
And not much green to speak of,
sage or otherwise.

The view, though—
stretching out and down
across cascading waves of stone
to the timberline,
then on to the valley below,
where the people and the troubles are.

They all seem small from here.
The fences disappear
and green runs into green,
all shades and hues:
the almost-blues of spruce
give way to willows
lining fields of burgeoning grain,
bowed down by rain.

And there is sage,
though not a lot.

And there's my plot
at the edge of town,
I see it now and must go down.

—Erik Jacobsen

This poem was a finalist in the 2025 BYU Studies Poetry Contest.

This Branch of the Church

The Early Development of Local Administration in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Part 4, Maturing Practice(s), 1860–1877

Brandon Plewe

A primary concern of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the spiritual and physical welfare of its members, and local congregations have always been the mechanism for that ministry. However, the structure and leadership of local administrative organizations have changed over the history of the Church, most significantly under Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. During these years, the terms and structures that are familiar to us—presidents, bishops, stakes, wards, and so on—emerged, but so did many practices that did not survive what has been called the 1877 Priesthood Reorganization.¹

This is the fourth and final article in a series evaluating the early development of local Church administration. The first three articles covered the administration of Joseph Smith Jr., the temporary sojourn along the Missouri River, and the early settlement of Utah Territory through the 1850s.² This installment covers the period from 1860 to 1877, when the ward and stake structure familiar to us predominated with a few very different approaches until it was ensconced as the Church standard in 1877.

1. See William G. Hartley, “[The Priesthood Organization of 1877: Brigham Young’s Last Achievement](#),” in *My Fellow Servants: Essays on the History of the Priesthood* (BYU Studies, 2010), 227–64.

2. Brandon Plewe, “[This Branch of the Church: The Early Development of Local Administration in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Part 1, The Emergent Church, 1830–845](#),” *BYU Studies* 64, no. 1 (2025): 45–80; “[Part 2, The Church in Flux, 1846–1851](#),” *BYU Studies* 64, no. 2 (2025): 163–69; “[Part 3, Administering an Expanding Territory, 1852–1859](#),” *BYU Studies* 64, no. 3 (2025): 205–31.

By late 1859, the first premodern regional stakes were firmly established in Logan (organized in November),³ Ogden, Salt Lake, Provo, Manti, and Parowan.⁴ Each had a presidency, high council, presiding bishopric, and organized priesthood quorums. Each consisted of multiple wards that fully functioned as distinct congregations presided over by a bishop.

The Death Knell of Dual Leadership and the Nauvoo Branch Ideal

At the April 1862 general conference, the issue of dual ward leadership⁵ came to a head. The night before, Church leaders resolved a dispute in the Spanish Fork Ward involving the ward president.⁶ At the time, this was the only remaining ward with both a president and bishop who seemed to work together.⁷ Orson Hyde proposed that the separate roles of ward president and bishop be officially clarified to the Saints, and if that could not be done, that they be combined into the office of bishop.⁸ This seems anachronistic, given that the practice had been virtually extinct for several years.

Yet there were at least six sermons on the topic over the next three days. The conference became a kind of post-mortem on Joseph Smith's ideal of the branch-stake continuum discussed in part 1 of this series.⁹ Three of the six sermons, given by Brigham Young, George A. Smith, and Daniel H. Wells, lamented that the dual-leader ideal had largely failed. In the words of Wells, "Is it impossible to have a President and a Bishop in the same Branch without there being strife and contention among the people?"¹⁰ Brigham Young made the case that the day-to-day responsibilities of the Melchizedek and Aaronic Priesthood were clearly laid out in scripture, so the roles of their respective local leaders should be

3. "Historian's Office Journal," 23:329 [image 333], (November 27, 1859), Historical Department Office Journal, 1844–2023, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/436e0e99-3fbf-45f6-8035-5cfa3a682fd0/0/332>.

4. Plewe, "Part 3, Administering an Expanding Territory, 1852–1859," 216.

5. As defined in Plewe, "Part 3, Administering an Expanding Territory, 1852–1859," 220–22.

6. Wilford Woodruff, "Journal (January 1, 1860–October 22, 1865)," April 6, 1862, Wilford Woodruff Papers, accessed July 3, 2025, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/58Ov>.

7. Plewe, "Part 3, Administering an Expanding Territory, 1852–1859," 222.

8. Orson Hyde, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool, 1855–86), 10:31, (April 7, 1862).

9. Plewe, "Part 1, The Emergent Church, 1830–1845," 60.

10. Daniel H. Wells, in *Journal of Discourses*, 9:300, (April 7, 1862).

equally clear.¹¹ George A. Smith implied that in the units where the two offices had been combined “and almost everything is made to devolve upon the head of the Bishop” (these were the days before auxiliary organizations and numerous members serving in callings), the bishops were overextended and overworked without a President.¹² Orson Hyde agreed that in principle, we are capable of having a bishop and a president, but “the present state of our limited knowledge” often prevents the successful implementation of both offices.¹³ They all felt that less ignorant presidents and bishops would be able to work together.

President Young made it clear that he still believed in the inspired structure that he called a “fully organized branch:”¹⁴ the congregational stake with a presidency, bishopric, high council, patriarch, and priesthood quorums. In his often-provocative style, he concluded,

It is chiefly because of the ignorance of the people that we often concentrate in one man these different offices and callings, but when the people are sufficiently informed and have advanced further in the knowledge of the truth, it will not be so, but every branch will have its full quota of officers . . . that are necessary for the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ. Until the people can receive and honor these helps and governments . . . the different offices will be concentrated in as few men as possible, for men will contend for power, and as to which shall be the greatest, until they are better informed.¹⁵

Ironically, Brigham Young’s prediction eventually came true, in a way. By the mid-1900s, most of the 1862 wards were eventually formed into stakes with their complete organization. The trend away from dual-leader wards was irreversible. As late as 1865, Brigham Young claimed that the practice was still occurring,¹⁶ but only Spanish Fork can be documented, and even that was only a temporary arrangement.¹⁷ Conversely, the dual leadership of president and bishop continued rather successfully at the stake level until 1877.

11. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 9:279, (April 7, 1862); Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 10:96, (April 7, 1862).

12. George A. Smith, in *Journal of Discourses*, 10:60, (April 7, 1862).

13. Hyde, in *Journal of Discourses*, 10:31, (April 7, 1862).

14. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 10:20, (October 6, 1962).

15. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 10:97, (April 7, 1862).

16. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 11:135, (August 1, 1865).

17. Spanish Fork Ward, *Manuscript History and Historical Reports*, 1851–1900, June 8, 1865. Aaron Johnson, the bishop of Springville, was temporarily given authority over Spanish Fork while Bishop Albert K. Thurber was on a mission for a year, and George W. Wilkins was called as ward president.

In light of this April 1862 conference, the 1860s and 1870s can be seen as a transitional time. The old ideal gave way to a period of pragmatism, of seeing what worked best among the Saints, resulting in the practice codified as a new ideal and new policy in 1877.

More Apostolates

The Apostle-led stake (or stake-like region) not only continued in Box Elder County under Lorenzo Snow but also proliferated during the 1860s. In fact, several of these were created in 1860–1861, hinting at a strategy by Brigham Young to have the Apostles more directly leading the Saints of Utah. He suggested to Ezra T. Benson in April 1860, “I want them [the Twelve] to preach in the Territory and ask other elders to preach abroad.”¹⁸

In the spring of 1859, Orson Hyde of the Twelve Apostles was called to assist the stake in Sanpete Valley, and in the following year, Ezra T. Benson was given a similar assignment in Cache Valley.¹⁹ In Logan, precise titles for Benson were rarely used (we have found no record of a stake conference during Benson’s tenure), but he appears to have followed the model of Lorenzo Snow in Brigham City and acted as stake president. Peter Maughan, who had originally been set apart as stake president less than a year previous, is called “Bishop Maughan” after Benson arrived, and appeared to function as the stake presiding bishop.

In Manti, the existing stake organization remained in place for a few years with Hyde having an untitled advisory role. In his first sermon after arriving, he said that his instructions from the prophet were “to feed the sheep” and to preach the Gospel to the saints who needed teaching.” Hyde also claimed that “he did not design to interfere with Sanpete authorities only through necessity.”²⁰ However, after early 1862, when President Welcome Chapman (who had been presiding since 1854) left

18. “Journal of President B. Young’s Office, Book D,” April 11, 1860, 75 [image 81], Brigham Young Office Files, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/59c492be-a813-4f8b-bc88-7cd952c95cdf/0/0>.

19. We have not found direct public sources for them being called, but numerous sources show that they moved to these valleys and served. See Manti Ward, “Book 4th, Manti Church History, 1860,” June 17, 1860, image 135, holograph, Manti Ward General Minutes, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/dda78231-96b9-4f40-b27a-5f339e23bdf5/0/0>; Remarks by Brigham Young, Logan, June 10, 1860, *Deseret News*, August 8, 1860, 178, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2584623t>

20. Manti Ward, “Book 4th, Manti Church History, 1860,” image 136.

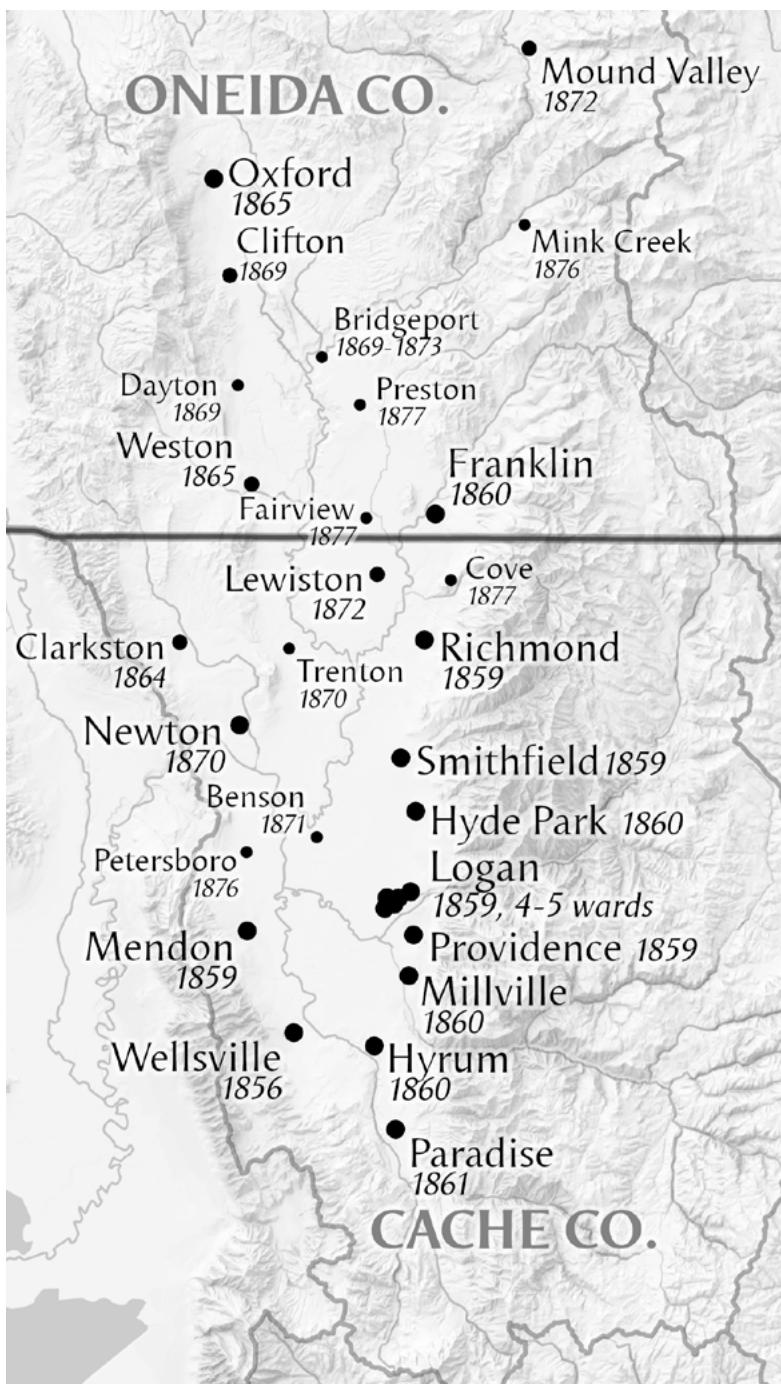


FIGURE 1. Congregations in Cache Valley, 1859–1877.

to work on the Salt Lake Temple, Hyde was the sole functioning leader over Sanpete and eventually Sevier counties.²¹

When Apostles Orson Pratt and Erastus Snow led “the Southern Mission” in 1861 to settle St. George,²² and when Charles C. Rich led the settlement of the Bear Lake Valley in 1863,²³ they followed different patterns. In both cases, they quickly organized wards or branches in the new settlements, but initially, regional organization was not a concern. Snow and Pratt (the latter left in 1864) called a high council in November 1862,²⁴ but there is no record of any early regional organization in Bear Lake Valley. Both areas were fully organized as stakes in 1869, with stake presidencies distinct from the Apostle, akin to Erastus Snow’s earlier sojourn in St. Louis (see part 3 in this series). In St. George, Snow held the title of “President of the Southern Mission,” and in Bear Lake, Rich was “President of the Bear Lake and Bear River region.”²⁵

However, it is not at all clear what the real difference was between the stake and the apostolate, especially in St. George. Remote settlements in Nevada and Kane County regularly reported at mission/stake conferences and were visited by Elder Snow,²⁶ but it is possible that they were only part of the mission, and the stake was limited to the congregations close to St. George. The wards of southern Iron County (Cedar, Harmony, and Kanarra) were usually represented in St. George stake conferences. In fact, in May 1872, Snow admitted that the jurisdiction of these two stakes was not clearly defined. “There were no specific boundaries defined between this Stake and the adjoining Stake north; for instance, a case of appeal from the Bishop’s Court of Cedar City, might be carried to the High Council of St. George, or the High Council at Parowan, as might be most advisable, under the circumstances.”²⁷

21. “Church Directory,” *Salt Lake Daily Telegraph*, April 25, 1868, 4, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/a8bb4378-2334-4f21-b705-4110c42fc351/0/3>.

22. “Minutes,” *Deseret News*, April 9, 1862, 8, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2591658>.

23. Historian’s Office General Church Minutes, May 22, 1864, image 6, holograph, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/413d3090-f796-453a-abc4-2c7fdf02934d/0/5>.

24. Annals of the Southern Utah Mission, November 1862, Book A Continuation, 158 [image 3], holograph, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/1ffeaa33-7cc2-4408-8c2f-5f1b3730c4f7/0/2>.

25. A. Z., “Correspondence,” *Deseret News*, November 19, 1873, 10, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2620930>.

26. Annals of the Southern Utah Mission, February 1872, *Book A Continuation*, 6–8.

27. Annals of the Southern Utah Mission, May 3, 1872, *Book A Continuation*, 14.

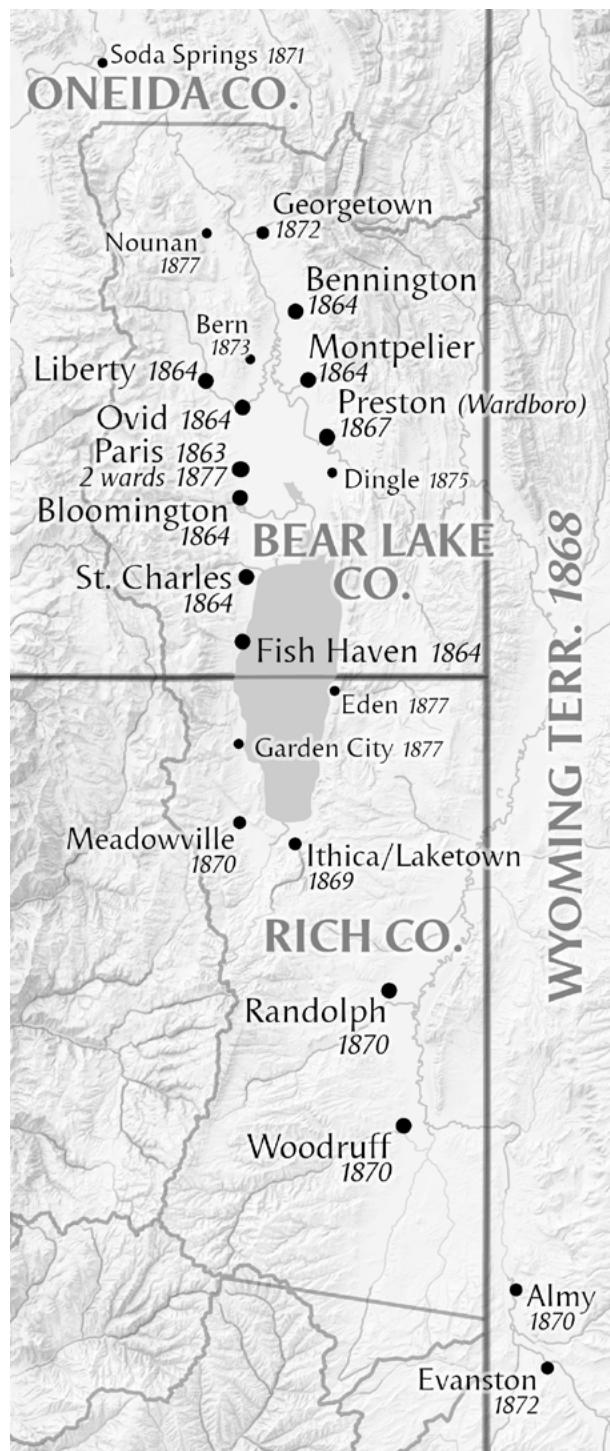


FIGURE 2. Congregations in the Bear Lake Valley, 1863–1877.

In summary, over its thirty-year existence, the idea of having Apostles preside over stakes or stake-like organizations took several forms, and the organizational structure changed over time:

- *Apostolate region*, an area not organized as a stake, with a resident Apostle presiding, but with some elements of a stake, such as a high council: Iowa 1846–1852, Parowan 1851, Box Elder 1856–about 1866, St. George 1861–1869, 1875–1877, Bear Lake 1863–1869, Sanpete 1863–1877, Sevier 1872–1874
- *Apostolate stake*, a fully organized stake with an Apostle as president: Cache 1860–1869, 1872–1877, Box Elder about 1867–1877, St. George 1874, Weber 1870–1877, Sevier 1874–1875, Bear Lake 1874–1877
- *Two-tier apostolate stake*, a fully organized stake with a president and high council, as well as a resident Apostle as advisor and/or presiding over a larger region: San Bernardino 1851–1857, Provo 1852–1853, Parowan 1854–1855, St. Louis 1855–1856, Carson Valley 1856, Sanpete 1860–1863, Weber 1869–1870, St. George 1869–1872, Bear Lake 1869–1874

This may seem rather haphazard, but at times there seemed to be some strategy here. In 1868, a directory of Church leaders was published that listed the Apostles then in place as “county presidents”: Erastus Snow over Washington, Kane, and Iron Counties; Orson Hyde over San Pete, Sevier, and Piute Counties; Lorenzo Snow over Box Elder; Ezra T. Benson over Cache; and Charles C. Rich over Rich County.²⁸ This suggests that the ideal arrangement (at least at this time) was intended to be the two-tier approach, with each Apostle serving several counties/stakes. However, each time that was attempted, the stake eventually ceded complete authority to the Apostle. This makes sense. It would be difficult for a presidency to operate with an Apostle constantly looking over its shoulder. The apostolate idea was eliminated in 1877 and never appeared again, although Apostles were given indirect regional supervisory roles within dozens of stakes in the 1960s.²⁹

28. “Church Directory,” *Salt Lake Daily Telegraph*, April 25, 1868, 4 [image 1], <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=30555108>.

29. See timeline in Brandon Plewe, S. Kent Brown, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard H. Jackson, eds., “Administering the Worldwide Church,” in *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History*, (BYU Press, 2014), 164.

Consolidating Bishoprics

During the 1860s, the practice of a bishop presiding over multiple settlements gained popularity throughout the territory. This trend occurred in several different forms for several different reasons, but collectively, it represented an increasingly broad authority vested in bishops.

The first new presiding bishops were in valleys that were settled with insufficient density to warrant a full stake, as in Tooele. In these situations, the bishop's regional jurisdiction was collectively called a ward (such as the Tooele Ward discussed in part 2),³⁰ but generic terms such as county or valley were more common. Some of the constituent congregations were occasionally called wards but were usually branches with a presiding elder.³¹ Such an organization could be considered a kind of proto-stake, and all these areas eventually became stakes in either 1869 or 1877. Contrary to past assumptions, there is no indication that the valleys surrounding the Wasatch Front other than Davis County (that is, Morgan, Summit, Wasatch, Tooele) were ever considered part of the Salt Lake Stake.³² Instead, the presiding bishop of each directly worked with the First Presidency and the Presiding Bishop, as stake presidents did.

Morgan County (1860–1877). The Weber Valley was first settled in 1859 in two clusters: one around Charles Peterson's ranch in the north (Weber City, now Peterson) and one around Thomas J. Thurston's ranch in the south (Littleton/Milton). The valley appears to have initially been under the administration of Lorin Farr and the stake in Ogden.³³ In 1860, Thurston was made the bishop over the entire valley,³⁴ but the ward was

30. Another example from “Summit County Ward” in 1870: Alma L. Smith to Brigham Young, August 12, 1870, Brigham Young Incoming Correspondence, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/475b6a16-f313-48c8-b1e7-d71722aa8698/0/0>.

31. For example, in church directories in 1873, the settlements of Summit and Morgan Counties are specifically called “wards” under a regional presiding bishop, even though most settlements are not specified as either wards or branches. “Presiding Elders and Bishops,” *Deseret News*, March 19, 1873, 7, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2622070>.

32. For example, Lynn M. Hilton, comp. and ed., *The Story of Salt Lake Stake, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: 150 Years of History 1847–1972* (Salt Lake Stake, 1972), 183; *Morgan Stake, 1877–1981: An Ecclesiastical History of Morgan County* [. . .] (Publishers Press, 1988), 10.

33. Morgan Utah North Stake, *Morgan Stake 1877–1981*, 9.

34. Brigham Young to Thomas J. Thurston, October 17, 1860, holograph, Letterbook, 5:623 [image 1287], Brigham Young Office Files, Church History Library, (hereafter cited as Brigham Young Letterbook) <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/adc114c8-073a-494e-98cf-c9d00a054123>.

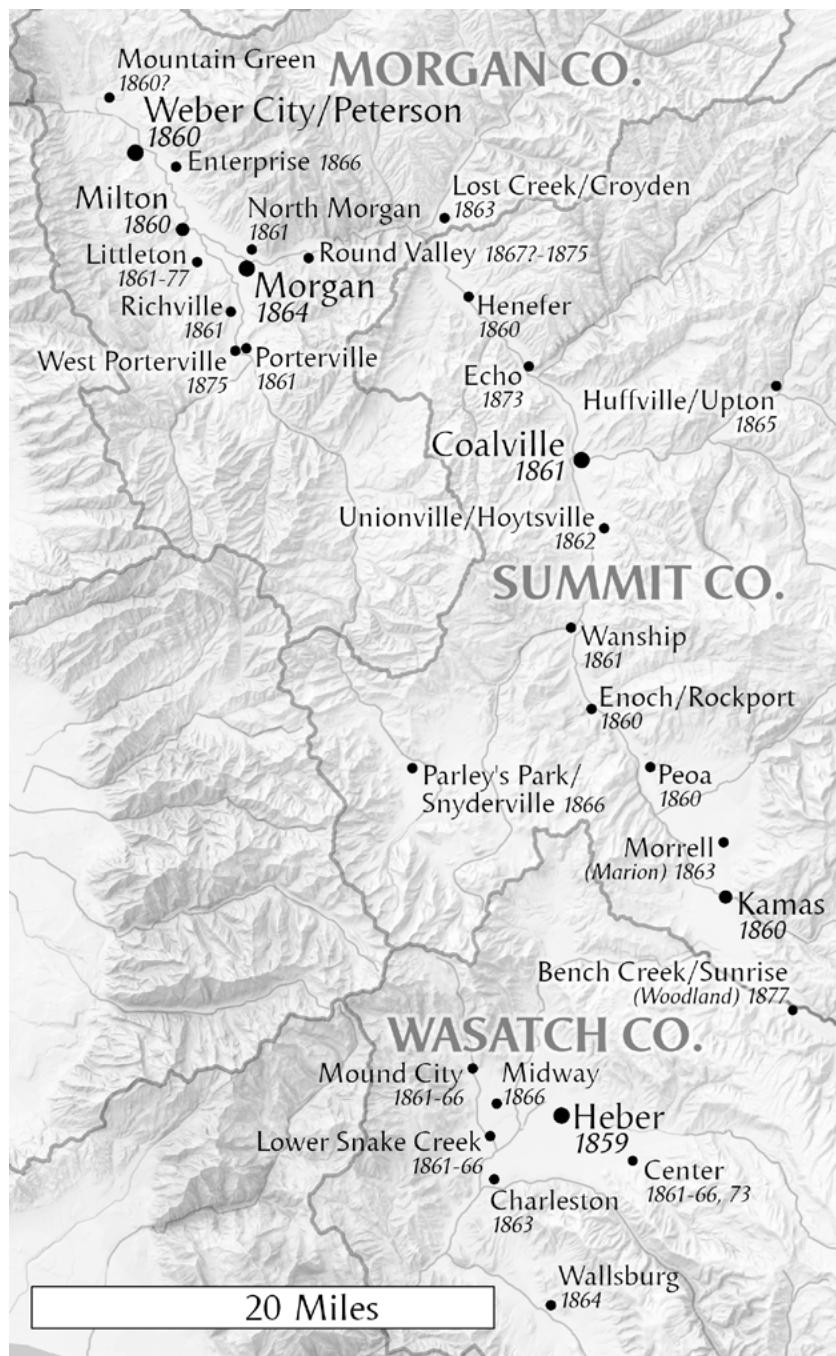


FIGURE 3. Congregations in Morgan, Summit, and Wasatch Counties, 1860–1877.

divided in 1861 or 1862 when Farr made both Peterson and Thurston bishops over the settlements around them.³⁵ By 1865, the two wards consisted of at least ten small settlements.

Wasatch County (1860–1877). The earliest settlement of the Provo Valley (Heber City) in 1858 and 1859 was under the direction of Provo Stake President James C. Snow, but when a dual-leader regional branch (including the entire valley) was created in November 1860,³⁶ it does not seem to have been connected to anywhere else and may have operated almost like a congregational stake (although it is not called one and did not have a high council). After President William Wall resigned in 1864, Bishop Joseph S. Murdock presided over the whole valley,³⁷ even when it was made part of the regional bishopric of William W. Cluff in February 1865.³⁸

Millard County (1861–1869). Since 1851, Fillmore had been an isolated ward or branch or congregational stake (see previous articles in this series for the uses of these terms) with a bishop and usually a president, having no regional administration for it and its surrounding village branches.³⁹ Then in April 1861, Brigham Young called Thomas Callister “to be the bishop in Fillmore . . . and also to be the Presiding Bishop over all the other wards or settlements in Millard County.”⁴⁰ Bishop Callister traveled among these settlements, calling new leaders and settling disputes (much like a stake president) until he became the first president of the stake when it was organized in 1869.⁴¹

35. Brigham Young to Thomas J. Thurston, June 11, 1862, holograph, Brigham Young Letterbook, 6:293 [image 625], holograph.

36. Brigham Young to the Brethren in Provo Valley, November 15, 1860, Brigham Young Letterbook 5:631 [image 1303], holograph.

37. Robert L. Campbell, “Visit to Wasatch County,” *Deseret News*, August 31, 1864, 2, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6j39n0s/2596099>.

38. Heber Branch, *Heber Branch General Minutes*, microfilm, vol. 1: 1859–1871, Later Reminiscence, Church History Library.

39. Brigham Young, open letter April 9, 1855, Brigham Young Letterbook 2:90 [image 233], holograph; Brigham Young, “Certificate of Ordination,” June 2, 1855, Brigham Young Letterbook 2:187 [image 423], <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets?id=7a67fc61-ea19-4673-96d6-fd4d49d329ee/0/422>.

40. Brigham Young to Thomas Callister, April 10, 1861, holograph, Thomas Callister Collection, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/115d2a7b-0f16-4b63-a3d8-fa1036f485e8/0/0>.

41. John L. Smith, Millard Stake Conference Minutes, March 9, 1869, image 5, holograph, Historian’s Office Minutes and Reports (Local Units), Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/1d1fee4a-2758-4169-bdf0-77d4e4fecd0e/0/0>.

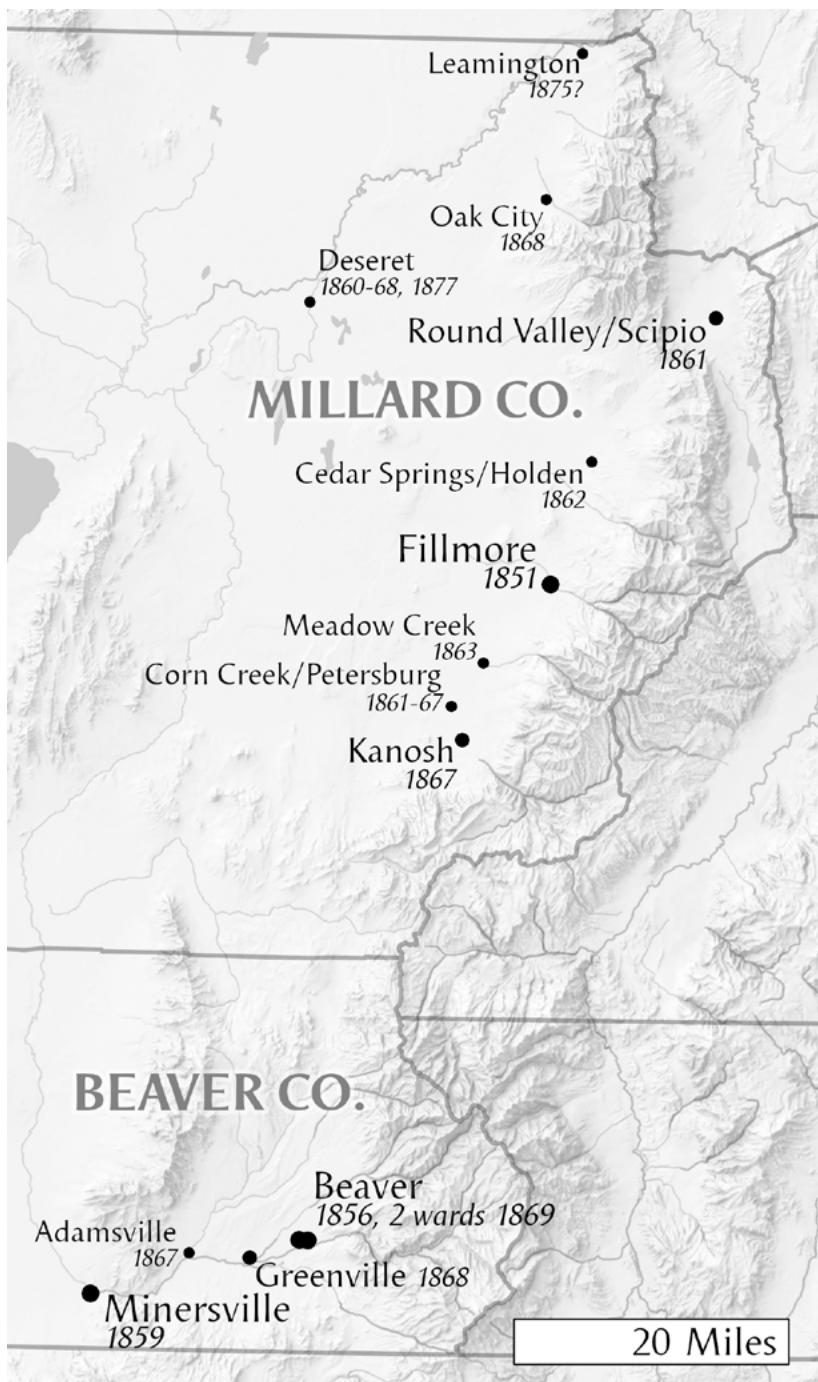


FIGURE 4. Congregations in Millard and Beaver Counties, 1851–1877.

The Weber Super-Ward

Then a much more radical event occurred. In August 1863, Brigham Young and several other leaders took a trip north to hold stake conferences.⁴² On the 25th, President Young surprised the congregation in Ogden when he “dismissed all the bishops.”⁴³ In a follow-up letter to stake members a month later, he explained further: “We have appointed Br. Chauncey W. West to act as Bishop for all the settlements and inhabitants in Weber County, and that we hereby release all other Bishops in said county . . . the inhabitants in each settlement are hereby permitted to elect a president, which Presidents will superintend Church affairs in their several localities and will assist Bishop West in his Bishopric.”⁴⁴

Each ward was then reorganized as a district during the autumn.⁴⁵ The exact reason for this mass demotion is difficult to ascertain without the exact text of Brigham Young’s talk.⁴⁶ It could be that there was some lingering apostasy and other scars from the movement of Joseph Morris the previous two years, which had been more disruptive in Weber County than elsewhere.⁴⁷ One evidence of this disruption is that over the next few months, the first missionaries from the New Organization of Joseph Smith III (later the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, now Community of Christ) came to the Ogden area and

42. J. V. Long, “President Young’s Trip North,” *Deseret News*, September 2, 1863, 1, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2596344>.

43. “Historian’s Office Journal,” 27:117 [image 122] (August 25, 1863).

44. Brigham Young to Chauncey W. West and Bishops and Brethren in Weber County, September 18, 1863, Brigham Young Letterbook 6:668 [image 1379], holograph.

45. See Ogden Second Ward, General Minutes, September 20, 1863, 13:2, microfilm, Church History Library; and North Ogden Ward, General Minutes, September 20, 1863, 13:1, microfilm, Church History Library.

46. Church clerk John V. Long recorded minutes of the meetings on this trip, but the last part of the notebook containing Brigham Young’s sermon is not extant. John V. Long, Shorthand notebook, August 1863, John V. Long Collection, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/d30731b3-db23-49f6-8e9d-8665146c3af0/84>.

47. In 1861, Joseph Morris, an English convert to Mormonism living in Weber County, believed he was a prophet and started the Church of Jesus Christ of the Most High. Morris and other leaders were killed in a shootout with law enforcement in South Weber in 1862, and his remaining followers dispersed. See Val Holley, “Slouching Towards Slaterville: Joseph Morris’s Wide Swath in Weber County” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2008): 247–64; see also C. LeRoy Anderson, *Joseph Morris and the Saga of the Morrisites (Revisited)* (Utah State University Press, 2010).

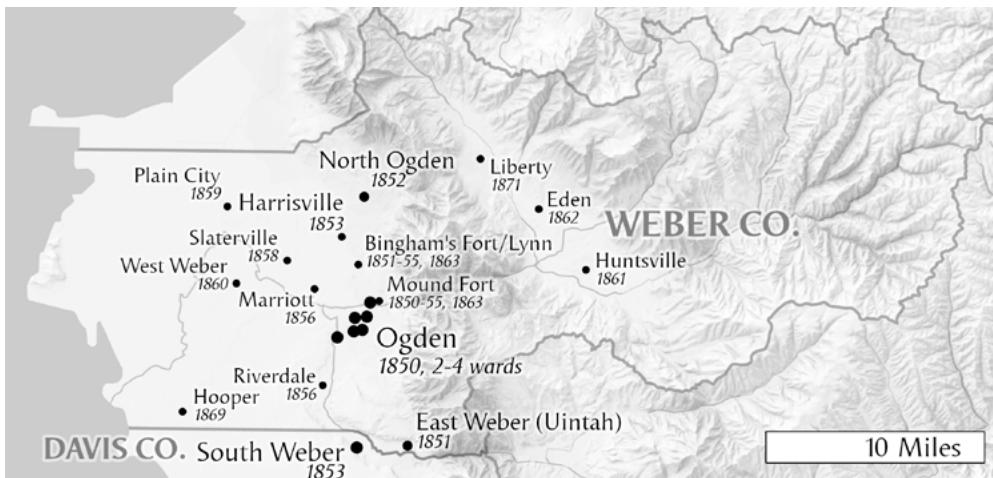


FIGURE 5. Congregations in Weber County, 1849–1877.

found more sympathetic listeners than elsewhere.⁴⁸ However, these missionaries did not arrive in Great Salt Lake City until August 11⁴⁹ and could not have had an effect on this stake within two weeks. Neither could it have been Bishop West instigating a power grab, as he had been on a mission to England and did not return until August 27.⁵⁰

In his sermon on the 25th, Brigham Young admonished the Ogden members to stop selling grain at low prices,⁵¹ but he had just given the same sermon in Logan and Brigham City without demoting them to districts. He also “chastised the bishops for neglect of duty, and for doing things they had not been commanded to do.”⁵² This appears to be the most likely cause. Extant records do not detail what the bishops had been doing while Presiding Bishop West was overseas, but it must have

48. North Ogden Ward, General Minutes, 13:2-3. In February 1864, twenty-seven persons were excommunicated in stake conference. “Historian’s Office Journal,” February 7, 1864, 27:209 [image 216].

49. “Historian’s Office Journal,” August 11, 1863, 27:109 [image 114].

50. “Historian’s Office Journal,” August 27, 1862, 27:118.

51. It is possible that wards were competing against each other to sell to speculators who resold it to miners in Montana and Idaho, driving the prices down. The September 18 letter suggests that some members were not paying tithing on the “under the table” proceeds.

52. Long, “President Young’s Trip North,” 1. Unfortunately, this only gives a summary of the talk of the 25th; the original minutes of the conference are missing Young’s sermon, which could have given insight into his rationale.

been quite problematic and pervasive. The September letter suggests it may have involved the mismanagement of tithing (a common reason for bishops getting in trouble).

Occasionally, Bishop West's new organization is called the Weber County Ward,⁵³ and for all practical purposes, the districts were essentially dependent branches of the county ward. They were called "branches" occasionally,⁵⁴ and a few were called "wards" once or twice.⁵⁵ New districts were formed as the settlement expanded. In 1877, this larger organization disappeared, and all the districts were reorganized as wards.

The Mission of A. Milton Musser

The next round of regional presiding bishops in 1864–1865 came in a variety of forms but largely reflected the work of one man: Amos Milton Musser. He began his church service as a clerk in the General Tithing Office until he was called as a "traveling bishop" in 1858 (although he was never ordained a bishop but remained a seventy).⁵⁶ His primary responsibility was to tour the territory, assisting local bishops to ensure the tithing system worked efficiently and honestly, especially in transferring donated goods to and from the General Tithing Office. He soon became something of a field agent for the First Presidency, gathering information on how the stakes and wards functioned and implementing changes as directed by Brigham Young.

Although the evidence is only indirect, the result of this factfinding mission was that some bishops and their wards were working out better than others. In a few extreme cases, members had accused their bishop of mismanaging tithing, with a couple bishops being removed as a result.⁵⁷

53. For example, Captain Horton D. Haight, "Outfit Reports," image 6, Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company, 1866, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/63fb1aba-6158-48cb-90f2-cc0db8d40338/0/5>.

54. For example, Franklin D. Richards called the Ogden congregations "branches" in Franklin D. Richards, Journal, April 24–25, 1875, vol. 23, image 152, holograph, Richards Family Collection, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/bb9586d0-592c-4022-8de0-e69849f1c172/0/0>.

55. For example, "Historian's Office Journal," February 6, 1864, 27:209 [image 216], holograph.

56. Karl Brooks, "The Life of Amos Milton Musser" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1961), 72–73, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/4558/>.

57. For example, Bishop Warren S. Snow in Manti. John A. Peterson, "Warren Stone Snow, a Man in Between: The Biography of a Mormon Defender" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1985), <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/5042/>.

In 1864, President Young put Musser in charge of an initiative to give some bishops (likely the most trusted and reliable) regional authority over multiple congregations, a procedure Young and Musser often referred to as “blending.”⁵⁸ In June 1864, Musser made his first trip to Grantsville, which had been without a leader after Bishop William G. Young resettled in Bear Lake Valley (becoming the first bishop of St. Charles).⁵⁹ Instead of calling a new bishop, Musser appointed the previous bishop as a branch president under Tooele Bishop Rowberry. Reading a letter from Brigham Young granting Rowberry authority over all the branches in the county (despite a very similar letter in 1853 discussed in part 2 when he was presiding over only two or three settlements),⁶⁰ Musser said that President Young was “lessening the number of bishops where he can find good presiding bishops.”

At this time, emigrants from Sanpete County formed the first settlements in Sevier County, under the regional apostolate of Orson Hyde. Thus, it made sense for Hyde, not Musser, to implement the First Presidency’s directive for Nelson Higgins “to officiate as Bishop in Richfield and the region adjacent.”⁶¹ Higgins served in this position until the area was abandoned during the Black Hawk War in the summer of 1867.⁶²

Musser continued his work elsewhere. In October 1864, John Murdock was ordained in Salt Lake City “to preside in Beaver City and throughout Beaver County,”⁶³ but it was Musser who brought Murdock to Beaver in November and had him sustained by the community.⁶⁴ At

58. Brigham Young to A. Milton Musser, January 24, 1865, Brigham Young Letterbook 7:762 [image 1557], holograph.

59. Grantsville Ward Manuscript History, June 1864, microfilm, Church History Library.

60. Brigham Young to John Rowberry, June 15, 1864, Brigham Young Letterbook, 7:216 [image 457], holograph.

61. Orson Hyde to George A. Smith, May 31, 1864, image 22, holograph, George A. Smith Papers, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/685e0065-336a-4bea-bb7e-2ae861de2304/0/21>; Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball to the inhabitants of Richfield, August 2, 1864, Brigham Young Letterbook, 7:260 [image 547], holograph.

62. H. H. Kearns to Nelson G. Higgins, April 5, 1867, image 51, holograph, Nelson Higgins Papers, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/fec8c92ec-313f-440f-83a9-b2312eb8c8d7/0/50>.

63. First Presidency letter, October 25, 1864, Brigham Young Letterbook, 7:316 [image 661].

64. A. Milton Musser, Diary, November 5, 1864, image 3, holograph, A. Milton Musser Diaries 1852–1876, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/bccc084b-d63a-4db5-b98e-d344b05c4e6b/0/2>.

this point, Millard and Beaver Counties had very similar organizational structures.

Brigham Young put Musser to work at the beginning of 1865 with instructions for several blendings of wards along the Wasatch Front, likely wards that were small or struggling.⁶⁵ He attached Santaquin to the Payson bishop on January 3rd;⁶⁶ Cedar Valley to Lehi and Alpine to American Fork on January 25; Little Cottonwood (now Cottonwood Heights) to South Cottonwood (now Murray) on January 26;⁶⁷ and reattached Herriman to West Jordan on February 12.⁶⁸ All these dependent wards remained as separate congregations under the neighboring presiding bishop through 1873 and likely until the 1877 Reorganization, although some of them had their own bishop (usually only acting) by 1867.⁶⁹

President Young then introduced yet another wrinkle into the presiding bishop concept on January 26, 1865: He called William W. Cluff to serve as the bishop over all of Summit, Morgan, and Wasatch Counties (some of which already had their own regional presiding bishops), creating a unique three-tier system.⁷⁰ Again it was A. Milton Musser who escorted Cluff to be sustained by his new dispersed flock, first in Heber City on February 2,⁷¹ then Peoa and the rest of Summit County on the 5th and 6th.⁷² Unlike other regional bishops, his jurisdiction was only regional, as his home ward of Coalville retained its bishop.⁷³ Cluff presided over this expansive jurisdiction until a new independent presiding bishop was called for the four branches in Wasatch County in 1867⁷⁴ and

65. Brigham Young to A. Milton Musser, January 24, 1865, Brigham Young Letter-book, 7:762 [image 1557], holograph.

66. Brigham Young to A. Milton Musser, January 3, 1865, Brigham Young Letter-book, 7:416 [image 859].

67. Musser, Diary, January 27, 1865, image 3.

68. Musser, Diary, February 12, 1865, image 14.

69. "Presiding Elders and Bishops," *Deseret News*, March 19, 1873, 7, <https://news.papers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2622070>.

70. "The Cluff Family Journal," (Cluff Family Reunion, 1904; rearranged, Viva Cluff Whetten, 1993), 146, quoting William W. Cluff's private journal, <https://www.familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/8518438>.

71. Musser, Diary, February 4, 1865, image 9.

72. Musser, Diary, February 5–6, 1865, image 12.

73. Bishop H. B. Wilde, Coalville Ward General Minutes 1866–1889, 3:1, Church History Library.

74. Midway Ward, "Record for the Quorum of High Priests at Midway," March 10, 1867, image 7–8, holograph, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/5378a5d6-052e-4c89-9bf0-9513718ec674/0/7>.

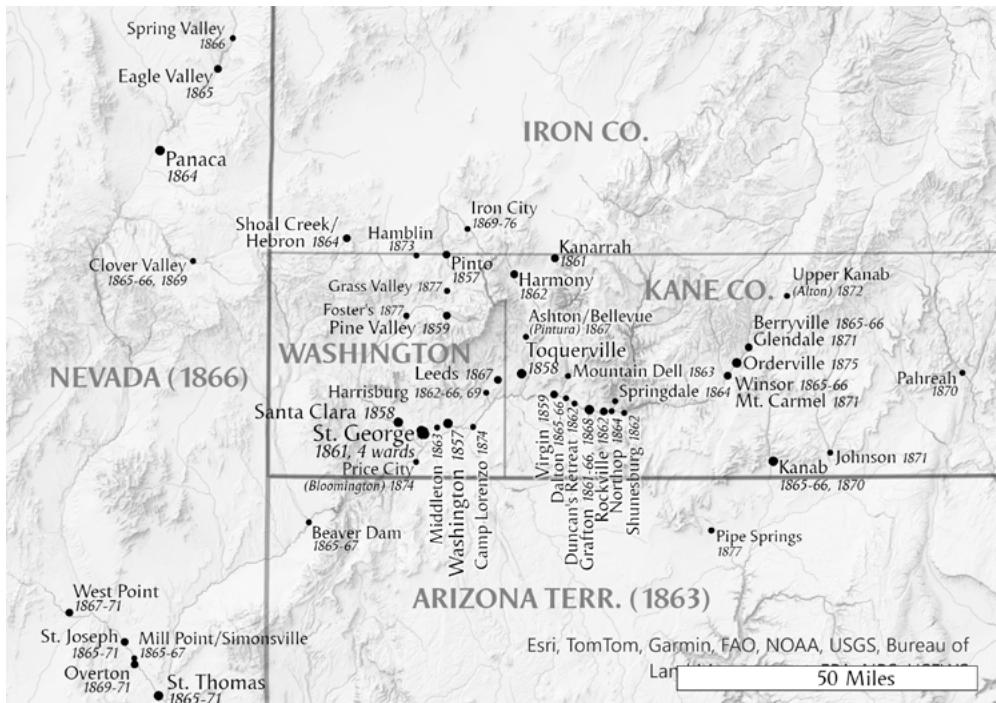


FIGURE 6. Congregations in the St. George area, 1863–1877.

southern Summit County received its own presiding bishop in 1870.⁷⁵ Cluff retained authority over Morgan and northern Summit Counties until 1877 when he became president of the new Summit Stake.

Musser intended to continue his work after the flurry of activity in early 1865. After further visits around the territory, in October, he proposed several more blendings, including presiding bishops over all the Southern Mission, over Sevier and Piute County, and over Sanpete County.⁷⁶ However, none of these were implemented as such, and in 1866 he shifted his focus to building the Deseret Telegraph network.

In the Southern Mission, the trend continued in yet another form of regional bishopric. Here, as in Sevier County, Erastus Snow had the

75. Brigham Young to Samuel F. Atwood, October 29, 1870, Brigham Young Letter-book, 12:405–406, [images 872, 874], holograph.

76. A. Milton Musser to Brigham Young, October 2, 1865, images 1–2, General Incoming Correspondence, Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/b6cd9a56-3c13-47c8-a2e3-77e40151f07a/0/0>.

authority as an Apostle to enact organizational changes himself. Snow's mission covered a much larger area than the other stakes, and limited water sources in the desert led to the creation of dozens of tiny settlements that were often too small to support a full ward but could function in some form (see fig. 6). Here it became common to follow the model of West Jordan Ward (see part 3) by giving bishops of the larger settlements (*regional wards*) authority over surrounding smaller places. These alignments would often change as settlements grew, multiplied, or were abandoned.

The *regional wards* around St. George included:⁷⁷ Toquerville Ward (two to four dependent branches, March 1862–May 1868); Grafton/Rockville Ward (three to six branches, March 1862–1871); Panaca Ward (three branches, August 1865–July 1867); the Muddy River Valley centered on St. Thomas (August 1865–1870);⁷⁸ Pine Valley Ward (four branches, May 1866);⁷⁹ Virgin City (three branches, May 1868);⁸⁰ Hebron Ward (two branches, November 1869–1877); Pinto Ward (three settlements, November 1869–1877); Long Valley Ward (two to four settlements, 1865–1866, May 1871–1877);⁸¹ and Kanab Ward (three settlements, August 1875).⁸²

77. Several of these are itemized in the business carried out at mission/stake conferences, most notably March 1862: *Annals of the Southern Utah Mission*, March 22, 1862, *Book A*, 137 [[image 144](#)]; November 1862: *Annals of the Southern Utah Mission*, November 15, 1862, *Book A Continuation*, 158 [[image 3](#)]; May 1865: “Minutes of a Conference Held at St. George, May 5th, 6th, and 7th,” *Deseret News*, May 24, 1865, 7, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2597797>; May 1866: “Minutes of Conference, Held at St George, May 4th, 5th and 6th, 1866,” *Deseret News*, May 24, 1866, 5, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2730196>; November 1866: *Annals of the Southern Utah Mission*, *Book A Continuation*, 357 [[image 4](#)]; November 1869: “Minutes of Conference for the Southern Mission, held in St. George, Nov. 5th, 6th, and 7th, 1869,” *Deseret News*, December 15, 1869, 11, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2604612>.

78. *Annals of the Southern Utah Mission*, August 12, 1865, *Book A Continuation*, 278 [[image 126](#)].

79. It is unclear if this announced reorganization was ever implemented.

80. *Annals of the Southern Utah Mission*, May 24, 1869, *Book A Continuation*, 410 [[image 57](#)].

81. *Annals of the Southern Utah Mission*, May 5, 1871, *Book A Continuation*, 19; “Conference at St. George,” *Deseret News*, May 24, 1871, 5, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2608537>.

82. Brigham Young to Levi Stewart, John R. Young, and L. John Nuttall, August 30, 1875, Letterbook 13:812–818 [[images 31–33](#)], typescript, Brigham Young Transcriptions, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/524376ba-ec7d-41bf-8d82-91aa2ef5fd3c/0/30>.

City-wide Presiding Bishops

One more form of presiding bishop occurred in some of the larger cities. As in Great Salt Lake City, neighborhood wards were created in Provo (four in 1852);⁸³ Ogden (three in 1856);⁸⁴ Logan (four in 1861, a fifth in 1865);⁸⁵ and St. George (four in 1862).⁸⁶ All of them started out as semi-organized wards that met collectively on Sundays. In fact, the Logan wards were initially little more than teachers' quorum districts led by presidents, not bishops.⁸⁷ By 1875, all of them had evolved into separate wards, but most took longer than in Salt Lake.

For much of the time in Provo, Ogden, and St. George, one of the ward bishops also served as a presiding bishop over the others, at least for collecting tithing. Logan had a separate presiding bishop.⁸⁸ In Cache and Weber County, the city presiding bishop was also responsible for the entire stake. But in St. George they appear to have only had jurisdiction over the city wards, and they were often collectively referred to as a single ward.⁸⁹ In fact, the St. George Ward bishop usually had different counselors than he did in his neighborhood ward, so they were clearly distinct organizations. Isolated dependent branches were sometimes attached to the St. George Ward collectively.⁹⁰

83. T. Bullock, "Visit of President Young and Suite to Utah County," *Millennial Star* 14, no. 40 (November 27, 1852): 630–631, <https://archive.org/details/MStarVol14/page/n635/mode/2up>.

84. Ogden Second Ward, General Minutes, 13:1.

85. Logan Teachers Quorum minutes, Cache Stake general minutes, 11:11, 59, Church History Library.

86. "Minutes," *Deseret News*, April 9 1862, 328, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2591595>.

87. "Logan Ward Historical Record of Acting Teachers, 1860–1875," Teachers Quorum Meeting Minutes, Cache Stake General Minutes, vol. 11, 11 [image 15], Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/c5d92e98-6696-4399-abbf-bb267246130/0/0>.

88. Provo: Brigham Young to Silas Smith and the Brethren in Provo, July 17, 1860, image 14, holograph, Brigham Young Office Files, General Outgoing Correspondence, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/e075d080-0f07-4eef-b5d4-026b12c1d0cb/0/13>. Ogden: Joanne J. Hanson, comp., *Ogden Utah Weber Stake 1851–2001: A Chronological History* (n.p., 2003), image 29, <https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/viewer/157590/?offset=0#page=29&viewer=picture>. St. George: James G. Bleak, "Minutes of Conference," *Deseret News*, June 29, 1870, 12, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2605938>. Logan: "Excursion through the Northern Counties," *Deseret News*, June 20, 1860, 4, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2584215>.

89. Bleak, "Minutes of Conference," *Deseret News*, June 29, 1870, 12, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2605938>.

90. For example, Beaver Dam in 1865. *Annals of the Southern Utah Mission*, August 12, 1865, *Book A Continuation*, 278 [image 126].

Things were more unorthodox in Provo during this period. In 1859, Stake President James C. Snow was not available to serve (most likely, he was in hiding to avoid arrest for plural marriage),⁹¹ and Silas Smith (who for the first time was not one of the city ward bishops) was made the presiding bishop and temporary acting president.⁹² This situation turned out to not be so temporary; Snow never returned to his presidency even when he returned to public view, and Bishop Smith was followed by William M. Miller in 1860 and Abraham O. Smoot in 1868.⁹³ They had the same position, primarily as presiding bishop of Provo and also acting as president of the stake (or at least, president of the high council) in a secondary role. All three were almost always referred to as “bishop,” although Bishop Smoot was occasionally called “president” starting in mid-1870.⁹⁴ None of these three bishops appear to have exerted much authority beyond Provo, although they may have had it in theory.

This wave of regional/presiding bishops may seem like the emergence of a new consistent practice, but there are a number of differences in these various implementations. In some cases, the individual wards and branches still retained their distinctness as a separate organization, with the presiding bishop in a secondary specialized role, primarily to organize the transfer of tithing money and goods and to advise ward bishops. This was the case in the more mature stakes such as Salt Lake, Utah County, and Sanpete. At the other extreme were dependent wards and branches, such as in West Jordan and St. George Stake, where the smaller congregation was only partially or simply organized and depended on the bishop for much of their operation. The Weber County Ward was somewhere in the middle. Their districts functioned day to day like regular wards or branches but were structurally very much attached to the presiding bishop, who had a broader role than

91. Wilford Woodruff, “Journal (January 1, 1854–December 31, 1859),” March 23, 1859, Wilford Woodruff Papers, accessed September 24, 2025, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/mw8O>.

92. Brigham Young to the Saints in and About Provo City, May 16, 1859, Brigham Young Letterbook, 5:137 [image 331], holograph; Brigham Young to Elias Blackburn, June 4, 1859, Brigham Young Letterbook, 5:146 [image 349], holograph.

93. Brigham Young to Silas Smith and the Brethren in Provo, July 17, 1860, image 14, Brigham Young Office Files, General Outgoing Correspondence, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/e075d080-0f07-4eef-b5d4-026b12c1d0cb/0/13>; Wilford Woodruff, “Journal (October 22, 1865–December 31, 1872),” February 8, 1868, Wilford Woodruff Papers, accessed July 21, 2025, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/Nk06>.

94. Brigham Young to A. O. Smoot, May 31, 1870, Brigham Young Letterbook, 12:151 [image 376], holograph.

other presiding bishops.⁹⁵ Between these examples lay varying degrees of autonomy and dependence that (yet again) make it difficult to clearly categorize congregations.

A Wave of New Stakes

By the late 1860s, several outlying settlement areas were maturing, leading to five of the regional bishoprics and apostolates being reorganized as full stakes in late 1868 and 1869. This is likely evidence of the stake gaining acceptance as the ideal form of regional administration, although it was not universal until 1877.

Brigham Young personally organized the first new stake at Nephi on September 20, 1868, with Jacob G. Bigler as stake president.⁹⁶ The following spring, Apostles George A. Smith, Erastus Snow, and Joseph F. Smith organized a stake in Fillmore on March 9, with Thomas Callister as stake president,⁹⁷ and a stake in Beaver on March 12, with John R. Murdock as stake president.⁹⁸

These three stakes had a lot in common. All three had been regional bishoprics, and the three new presidents had been the presiding bishops. All three were very small: Juab County had one ward and two branches; Beaver had four wards, with the city being divided in two at this time; and Millard County had three wards (two new) and three branches (fig. 4). Meanwhile, there were other areas with more members and more settlements that were not reorganized. Why was this? A likely reason was that these were upgraded to stakes—not because of their size and complexity but because their leaders were seen as more ready to be trusted with the added responsibility.

95. For example, the First Presidency exclusively conversed with county bishop Chauncy West and his successor Lester Herrick on local matters in Weber County. At the same time, they were directly conversing with the local bishops of settlements in other counties. Brigham Young to Alfred Cordon and others, May 10, 1864, Brigham Young Letterbook, 7:184, 296 [images 395, 619].

96. “Editorial Correspondence: President Young’s Trip South,” *Deseret News*, September 30, 1868, 2, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2601886>; Woodruff, “Journal (October 22, 1865–December 31, 1872),” September 18, 1868.

97. Millard Stake Conference Minutes, March 8–9, 1869, image 5, Historian’s Office Minutes and Reports (Local Units), <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/1d1fee4a-2758-4169-bdf0-77d4e4fec0e/0/0>.

98. Beaver Stake Conference Minutes, March 12, 1869, image 2, Historian’s Office Minutes and Reports (Local Units), <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/bc4d1096-702e-4ea7-b77c-fe545b041d80/0/1>; David B. Adams, Diary, March 12, 1869, 24 [image 27], typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/e733b030-0b24-424c-9e6f-4b45a7104ed9/1/46>.

The next two stakes organized in 1869 were in larger settlement areas that had been functioning as apostolates. Bear Lake Stake was organized June 19, 1869, with David P. Kimball as stake president.⁹⁹ St. George Stake was the last of this wave of stakes, organized November 5, 1869, with Joseph W. Young as stake president.¹⁰⁰ As mentioned, the Southern Mission had a high council since 1864 under the apostolate of Erastus Snow, who continued to oversee the mission after 1869.

A Little of Everything in the 1870s

The three trends that dominated the 1860s (apostolates, regional bishoprics, stakes) continued through the early 1870s. Rather than any new initiatives, the significant organizational events of these years were usually implementing various existing practices in reaction to events on the ground (especially deaths).

Cache County. After Apostle Ezra T. Benson died suddenly in September 1869,¹⁰¹ Presiding Bishop Peter Maughan acted as president (as Abraham O. Smoot was doing at this time in Provo) until he died in 1871.¹⁰² On August 31 or September 1, 1872, the apostolate returned when Brigham Young Jr. was sustained as “President of Cache Valley and the Bear River and Soda Springs country.”¹⁰³ Subsequently, he was occasionally called the stake president,¹⁰⁴ although there is no documentation that a full stake organization (including a high council) ever functioned during his tenure.

Weber County. The stake in Ogden became an apostolate stake when Franklin D. Richards arrived in 1869. Initially, he was there to serve as county judge,¹⁰⁵ but in March, Brigham Young gave him authority to “see to all tithing matters” and to “take a general supervision” of Weber

99. “Editorial Correspondence,” *Deseret News*, July 7, 1869, 1, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2603358>; Woodruff, “Journal (October 22, 1865–December 31, 1872),” June 20, 1869.

100. James G. Bleak, “Minutes of Conference,” *Deseret News*, December 15, 1869, 11, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2604612>.

101. “Sudden Death of Elder Ezra T. Benson, One of the Twelve Apostles,” *Deseret News*, September 8, 1869, 6, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2603812>.

102. “Death of Hon. P. Maughan,” *Salt Lake Herald*, April 25, 1871, 3, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=11530471>; “Home News,” *Deseret News*, May 3, 1871, 12, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2608405>.

103. “Two Days’ Meetings,” *Deseret News*, September 11, 1872, 12, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2665320>.

104. “Local and Other Matters: Home from a Preaching Tour,” *Deseret News*, October 1, 1873, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2620313>.

105. Richards, Journal, February 19, 1869, vol. 17, image 78.

County.¹⁰⁶ In a two-tier system similar to Bear Lake and St. George, Elder Richards and Stake President Lorin Farr worked together for over a year, but Richards gradually took on more of the primary role.¹⁰⁷ By the time Farr left on a mission in November 1870,¹⁰⁸ Richards was essentially the sole presiding authority, and by 1874, he was referred to as “President of the [Weber/Ogden] Stake.”¹⁰⁹ This was very similar to what had happened in Sanpete County a decade earlier, except that other stake officers, including the high council, continued to function as normal.

Juab County. During the 1870s, Nephi had one of the most unique and simplest leadership situations. After twenty years of off-and-on feuding between the various leaders,¹¹⁰ in November 1871, Joel Grover was called and ordained to simultaneously serve as the Nephi Ward bishop, the Juab stake president, and the Juab stake presiding bishop, which would continue until 1877.¹¹¹

Sevier County. In 1870, Brigham Young gave William Morrison, the former county judge, permission to lead previous settlers back to the Sevier Valley,¹¹² which Morrison interpreted as a call to preside there.¹¹³ However, upon returning, Nelson Higgins reclaimed the regional presiding bishopric he had held previously.¹¹⁴ The ensuing dispute between them was only resolved when Brigham Young called his son Joseph A. Young in May 1872

106. Brigham Young to Franklin D. Richards, March 24, 1869, Brigham Young Letter-book, 11:431 [image 937], holograph; Richards, Journal, [March 24, 1869, vol. 17, image 111](#).

107. Multiple events in Richards’ journal show their working relationship, Richards, Journal, vols. 17–18.

108. Richards, Journal, November 22, 1870, vol. 18, image 322, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/1573a522-d4df-415d-a5db-a39eb319f058/0/321>; Lorin Farr, Mission Journal 1870, p. 1 (November 22, 1870), Harold F. Nufer Collection of the Lorin Farr Papers (1820–1906), L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

109. “Annual Conference of the Weber Stake of Zion,” *Ogden Semi-Weekly Junction*, January 21, 1874, 6–7, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=23754388>.

110. Plewe, “Part 3: Administering an Expanding Territory,” 220–22.

111. Daniel H. Wells to the Saints in Nephi, November 17, 1871, Brigham Young Letter-book, 12:901 [image 1860], holograph; “Presiding Elders and Bishops,” *Deseret News*, March 19, 1871, 7, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2622070>.

112. Brigham Young to William Morrison, August 2, 1870, Brigham Young Letter-book 12:269 [image 604], holograph.

113. William Morrison to Brigham Young, July 26, 1871, images 1–2, holograph, General Incoming Correspondence, Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/9138842a-f688-44dc-b821-664bc76bcdd3>.

114. Richfield Utah Stake, Richfield Stake General Minutes, 1:30–32, microfilm, Church History Library.

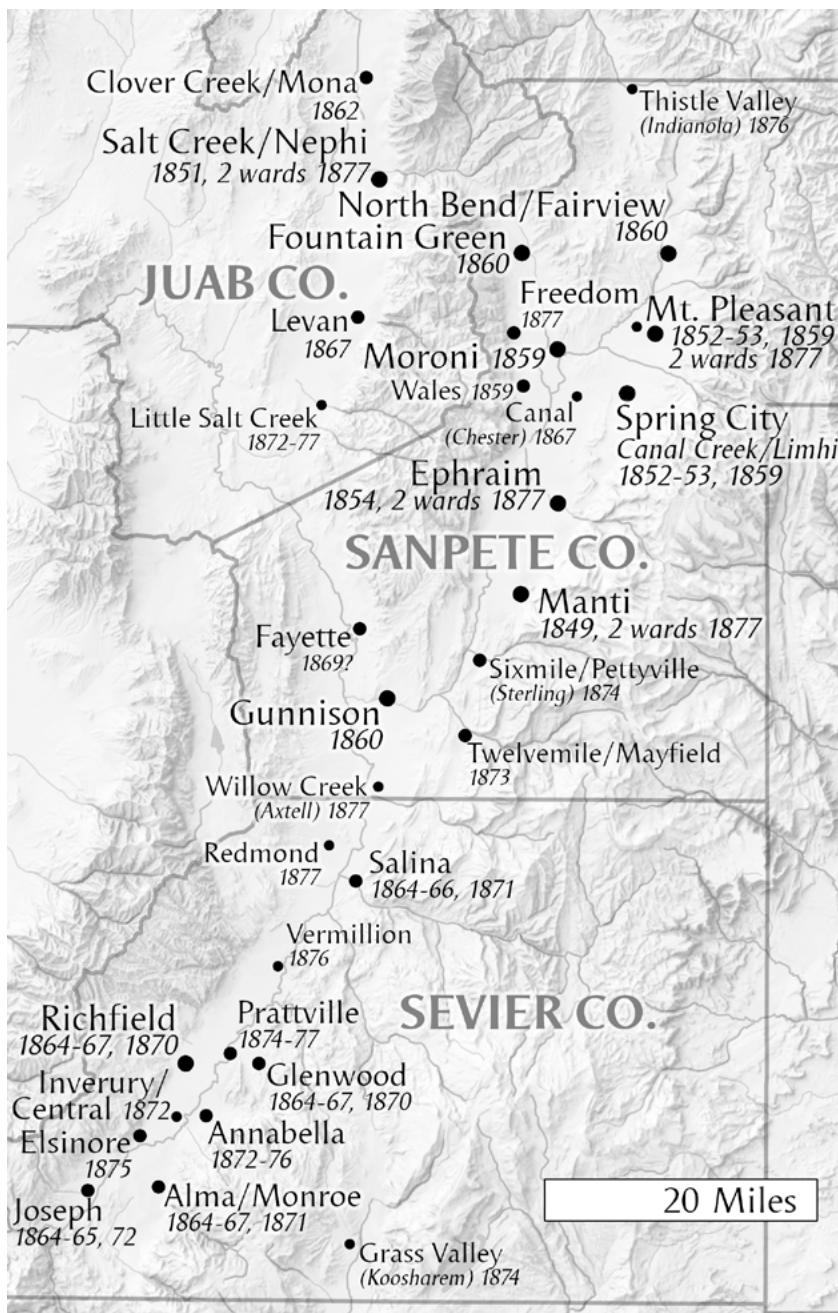


FIGURE 7. Congregations in Sanpete and Sevier Counties, 1849-1877.

as “president of the settlements in Sevier Valley”¹¹⁵ as far south as Kanab.¹¹⁶ At first, he presided over the region single-handedly, like an apostolate rather than a stake.¹¹⁷ A stake was fully organized in May 1874 with Young as president.¹¹⁸ After he died suddenly in August 1875,¹¹⁹ his counselors led the stake in a semi-organized state until the 1877 Reorganization.¹²⁰

St. George. When St. George Stake President Joseph W. Young died in 1873 while Erastus Snow was on a mission, his counselors took charge.¹²¹ Brigham Young’s son John Willard Young, an Apostle outside the Quorum of the Twelve and a member of the First Presidency, was called later that year to serve as both mission and stake president. But it does not appear that John Young did much, arriving from New York months after his call and returning east within a few months.¹²² After Erastus Snow

115. Richfield Stake General Minutes, 1:33.

116. Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Daniel N. Wells, May 7, 1872, Brigham Young Letterbook 13:69 [image 229], holograph.

117. In fact, Joseph A. had been privately ordained an Apostle and set apart as an assistant counselor by the First Presidency in 1864. This was not publicly known as he was never made a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, and the official validity of his ordination has since been disputed. See Research Concerning John W. Young’s Ordination to Apostleship, images 5–6, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/4f45c096-283d-4dd3-b761-7e414ba82794/0/4>.

118. Sevier Stake Organization Minutes, May 24, 1874, images 1–2, holograph, Historian’s Office Minutes and Reports (Local Units), <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/dce50a0b-8e24-4338-ab3f-7ebed2ddc7b/0/0>; “Correspondence: Meetings and Organizations in Sampet and Sevier Counties,” *Deseret News*, August 5, 1874, 14, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2612827>; Richfield Stake General Minutes, 1:75.

119. “Death of Joseph A. Young,” *Salt Lake Herald*, August 7, 1875, 3, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=11594190>.

120. This is suggested by the fact that, after President Joseph Young’s death, important communications were jointly addressed to and from Albert K. Thurber and William H. Seegmiller, the first and second counselors of the stake. See Brigham Young to Elders Thurber and Seegmiller, October 13, 1875, Brigham Young Letterbook 13:904–906 [images 1889–1893], holograph.

121. “Correspondence: Departed This Life,” *Deseret News*, June 11, 1873, 5, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2619059>; Annals of the Southern Utah Mission, May 10, 1873, Book B, 49; Andrew Jenson, “Robert Gardner,” in *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia: A Compilation of Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Women in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4 vols. (Andrew Jenson History, 1901–36), 2:625.

122. Brigham Young to John W. Young, October 23, 1873, holograph, Brigham Young Letterbook 13:488 [image 1069]; Brigham Young to John W. Young, November 13, 1873, Brigham Young Letterbook 13:518 [image 1129], holograph.

returned in 1875, the mission returned to its pre-1869 semi-organized state as an apostolate, although it was occasionally still called a stake.¹²³

Bear Lake Stake. The Bear Lake Stake also had an issue in 1873 when its stake president, David P. Kimball (son of Heber C. Kimball), was brought before a council of Brigham Young and other visiting Church leaders for an unstated issue in August. Although they considered removing him from the presidency, in the end they chose to retain him “on trial,” and he was sustained as president at the next stake conference in November.¹²⁴ However, by 1874 he had left the area, and Charles C. Rich again served as de facto stake president, returning the region to an apostolate.¹²⁵

Sanpete County. After several years leading on his own, Orson Hyde somewhat renewed the stake form in Sanpete County. In March 1870, a high council was reorganized for the south half of the county, although little evidence of its long-term activity has survived.¹²⁶ In May 1874, as the United Order was being organized across the county (with Hyde as president), a new stake was organized “in the northern part of Sanpete County” with William M. Seely as stake president.¹²⁷ However, this new stake is never mentioned again. Meanwhile, a stake president at Manti is not mentioned during this time.

Millard County. Stake President Thomas Callister was called on a mission in 1875, asking Fillmore Bishop Edward Partridge Jr. (who

123. For example, in the notes for a stake conference, Erastus Snow is sustained as “President of the Southern Mission,” but the conference is called “Conference of St. George Stake.” *Annals of the Southern Utah Mission*, November 5, 1876, **Book B Continuation**, 42.

124. Wilford Woodruff, “Journal (January 1, 1873–February 7, 1880),” August 28 and 30, 1873, Wilford Woodruff Papers, accessed August 29, 2025, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/l571>; George Osmond, “Correspondence,” *Deseret News*, November 19, 1873, 10, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2620930>.

125. Kimball’s departure is not documented, but he is not mentioned after 1872. “Trip to Bear Lake County, Various Organizations,” *Deseret News*, June 17, 1874, 3, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2635507>; “Conference at Paris,” *Deseret News*, February 3, 1875, 10, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2641530>; “Conference at Paris,” *Deseret News*, March 22, 1876, 9, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2626072>.

126. Sanpete Stake, Sanpete Stake Confidential Minutes, March 9, 1870, Church History Library. These minutes record sporadic high council meetings through August 1870, then nothing until 1877. See also Brigham Young to Manti High Council, May 27, 1870, Brigham Young Letterbook, 12:152 [image 378], holograph.

127. “Meetings and Organizations in Sanpete and Sevier Counties,” *Deseret News*, August 5, 1874, 14, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2612778>.

does not appear to have been the stake presiding bishop) to act in his absence.¹²⁸ This temporary presiding bishop/acting president situation was similar to what had occurred earlier in Cache and Utah Counties.

Panguitch. The status of the isolated settlement of Panguitch during its early history is unclear to us today, and possibly it was unclear to its residents at the time. From the time the first settlers arrived at the upper Sevier River in 1864 until they abandoned it in 1866 and resettled in 1871, Panguitch was visited once or twice by Erastus Snow from St. George. Snow does not seem to have exerted a great deal of authority there.¹²⁹ From 1872 to 1875, it was designated as part of the jurisdiction of Joseph A. Young in Richfield,¹³⁰ but usually it seems that Panguitch functioned on its own. It had a bishop starting in 1871 but was never called a ward.¹³¹ By early 1877, the small new settlements at Hillsdale (now Red Canyon), Mammoth (Hatch), Asay, Clifton (Cannonville), and Escalante appear to be dependent branches of Panguitch,¹³² so it is as much a regional bishopric as anything else (see part 3, fig. 3).

Thus, by the beginning of 1877, several stakes (Bear Lake, Cache, Sanpete, Sevier, Millard, St. George) were in a state of disrepair, operating in a less organized state than they had previously been. In fact, in many Church chronologies, the earlier organizations of some of these have

128. “The Journal of Edward Partridge Jr.” October 19, 1875, 2:142 [image 29], type-script, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/b8892521-1b7d-47db-ae3d-0a852b959056/0/28>.

129. For example, in 1865, Snow set Jens Nielsen apart as the first president of the branch (“Presiding Elder of the Branch,” but with the “privilege of selecting two counselors” and being “the acting Bishop for the time being.”) *Annals of the Southern Utah Mission*, May 1865, Book A Continuation, 266–67 [images 114–15]. Later the same year, Orson Hyde claims jurisdiction over the entire Sanpete and Sevier valleys at least as far as Circleville. Orson Hyde to Brigham Young, November 19, 1865, holograph, General Incoming Correspondence, Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/6bbee915-7c24-4e81-a57a-6612125b9f3e>.

130. Young, Kimball, and Wells, May 7, 1872; Panguitch Ward General Minutes, 1872–1916, 4:21, Church History Library.

131. *Annals of the Southern Utah Mission*, May 5–7, 1871, *Book A Continuation*, 19; “George Washington Sevy,” in Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 1:800.

132. Hatch Ward (Idaho Stake), Hatch Ward Manuscript History and Historical Reports, 1873, Church History Library. This record, created about 1900, is a later interpretation of the situation, likely based on evidence that we no longer have, such as oral histories; these branches did not leave their own records from this period to document their exact relationship with Panguitch.

been forgotten or minimized, and their 1877 reorganizations are often listed as the original organization of the stake.¹³³

At the same time, dozens of wards were in similar disrepair, with acting bishops who had never been officially ordained with counselors. A few, such as Liberty in Bear Lake Stake and Panaca in St. George Stake, had been in this state since the late 1860s.¹³⁴ Dozens more had previously been led by acting bishops for several years before being ordained.¹³⁵

It is unclear why this prolonged acting status was so common. It was not for a lack of available leadership with the authority to ordain bishops; many of these wards had nearby resident Apostles. In fact, in a few cases, Brigham Young himself appointed someone as acting bishop or visited an acting bishop without ordaining him.¹³⁶ In some cases, acting bishops may have been ordained with no surviving documentation. In many cases, an acting bishop was seen as temporary. For example, when the ordained bishop was called on a mission (a common occurrence) or was ill, he often put a counselor in charge; occasionally, the bishop never returned to service. Other acting bishop appointments may have been probationary, with Church leaders delaying ordination until confident in the acting bishop's ability—a practice most common in small wards with few qualified priesthood holders.

The United Order

In 1874, all this variety and complexity of local administration was further compounded by the addition of another layer of organization: The United Order was instituted across the territory, starting with St. George in February.¹³⁷ During the year, visiting Apostles reorganized each stake and ward as “branch[es] of the United Order” with a parallel corporate-like structure of a president, vice president(s), secretary, and board of

133. For example, the Sanpete, Cache, and Box Elder Stakes are shown as being first organized in 1877 in the 2013 *Church Almanac* (Deseret News, 2013), 402–3, 411.

134. “Editorial Correspondence,” 1.

135. Plewe, “Part 3, Administering an Expanding Territory, 1852–1859,” 210–11.

136. Acting bishops were especially common in the Bear Lake Valley under Apostle Charles C. Rich. One of the many trips that Brigham Young took to Bear Lake Valley without ordaining any of the bishops was when the stake was organized in 1869. “Editorial Correspondence,” 1; Woodruff, “Journal (October 22, 1865–December 31, 1872),” June 19, 1869.

137. Annals of the Southern Utah Mission, February 9, 1874, *Book B Continuation*, 12.

directors.¹³⁸ The president was almost always the bishop or stake president, and the vice presidents were his counselors.

In fact, in the rare cases when the Order and ecclesiastical leaders were different, conflict usually arose as in the dual-leader wards in previous decades. For example, in Kanab, John R. Young was called by Brigham Young to lead the United Order, not Bishop Levi Stewart. Almost immediately, questions arose over which leader was supposed to supervise the other. Members sided with one leader or the other. This came to a head when letters to Brigham Young questioned whether the United Order was still sanctioned by the prophet.¹³⁹ Young solved the problem by sending L. John Nuttall in August 1875 to replace both men.¹⁴⁰

In some areas, the Order and its organization had little effect on the day-to-day operation of the wards and quickly dissipated, especially in the Salt Lake Valley. However, in other areas, especially in Brigham City and the St. George Stake, the regular ward and stake organization was subsumed for months while activity was focused on instituting the Order. Traditional meetings of the bishopric, high council, and priesthood quorums were replaced by board and subcommittee meetings.¹⁴¹ Within a year, the Orders had ceased to function in most wards, and even in the several that persisted for many years, the ecclesiastical organization was again operating separate from and parallel to the United Order organization by 1876.¹⁴²

138. See “Meetings and Organizations in Sanpete and Sevier Counties,” *Deseret News*, August 5, 1874, 14, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2612778>.

139. Mary M. Judd to George A. Smith, January 1875, images 11–13, holograph, George A. Smith Papers, 1834–1877, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/f44a2b55-1fff-45fe-81db-04d65eb0048e/0/10>; Jehiel McConnell to Brigham Young, June 23, 1875, holograph, Brigham Young Office Files, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/853bd37c-8219-4e67-b823-87c8d9450592/0/0>.

140. Brigham Young to L. John Nuttall, August 30, 1875, Brigham Young Letterbook 13:816–18 [image 33], typescript. See also Brigham Young to Levi Stewart, August 30, 1875, Brigham Young Letterbook 13:812 [image 31], typescript; and Brigham Young to John R. Young, August 30, 1875, Brigham Young Letterbook 13:814–15 [image 32], typescript.

141. For example, the minutes of the St. George Stake (and United Order) was dominated by Order business from February 1874 through early 1876, including stake conferences at which parallel ecclesiastical and order authorities were sustained. In fact, at the November 1875 conference, members were rebaptized as members of the Order. Annals of the Southern Utah Mission, November 5–7, 1875, *Book B Continuation*, 60–64 [images 61–65].

142. For a general history of the United Order movement, including the trends discussed in this paragraph, see Leonard J. Arrington and Thomas Alexander, *Building the City of God: Community and Cooperation Among the Mormons* (Deseret Book, 1976).

The Priesthood Reorganization of 1877

At the beginning of 1877, Brigham Young was in relatively poor health. As he prepared for the dedication of the St. George Temple, he was likely aware that he would soon leave the Church in the hands of the Twelve Apostles. The Church he led, with most of the members living in hundreds of settlements across Utah Territory, was organized in several different ways.¹⁴³

- Five stakes were organized and operating much like a modern stake, with a presidency and high council. The only difference was the common but not universal presence of stake-level presiding bishops. These stakes were Salt Lake, Provo/Utah, Nephi/Juab, Beaver, and Parowan.
- Six stakes or counties were some form of apostolate, led by a resident Apostle with or without a high council or other elements of stake organization. These stakes were Bear Lake, Cache, Box Elder, Weber, Sanpete, and St. George.
- Two stakes were in a lapsed state without a president. These stakes were Sevier and Fillmore/Millard.
- Five counties or valleys were led by a presiding bishop alone. These stakes were Morgan, Tooele, Summit, Wasatch, and maybe Panguitch.

The variety had little to do with size. Beaver and Juab Stakes were organized but very small, while there were many more congregations in Tooele, Morgan, and Summit Counties with very little regional organization. It was also not a matter of age or maturity. Juab and Beaver Stakes were much younger than Sanpete and Weber but had a more modern form. Clearly, there was a need for standardization.

William Hartley gives a detailed account of the events of the Reorganization during 1877,¹⁴⁴ but a summary and reappraisal here is useful in light of our other findings. The movement started when the St. George Temple was dedicated during April general conference in St. George.

The first documented mention of the plan was when Brigham Young announced it in meetings of the Twelve on March 30 and April 3, just

143. In addition to the examples discussed in this paper, details about the organizational history of each stake, ward, and branch can be found at MormonPlaces, <https://mormonplaces.bry.edu/>.

144. Hartley, “Priesthood Organization of 1877,” 227–64.

before conference began. Unfortunately, we do not have a detailed record of what he said, but his son Brigham Jr. wrote, “Father proposed the Twelve spending their time this season in perfecting the organization of the Church in the various stakes of Zion.”¹⁴⁵ Franklin D. Richards recorded, “The Twelve are to travel and organize Stakes of Zion.”¹⁴⁶ Wilford Woodruff, the most prolific diarist of his day, only mentioned that the meeting occurred.¹⁴⁷

Hartley acknowledges that very little has been documented about Brigham Young’s deliberations prior to this and any early rationale he developed for the reorganization.¹⁴⁸ During the five days of public meetings in St. George, April 3–8 (including the temple dedication, general conference, and the St. George Stake organization), Young never mentions any reorganization plan or the issues that might justify such.¹⁴⁹

In a meeting the day before general conference, a new St. George Stake presidency and new priesthood quorum presidencies were sustained with no fanfare.¹⁵⁰ It likely seemed to the congregation as simply an overdue return to the stake’s well-organized period of the early 1870s, but this clearly set a crucial precedent for the rest of the territory. As they returned north after the close of conference, Brigham and the Twelve immediately began reorganizing other units. Then over the next five months, Brigham Young and other Church leaders traveled around the territory to organize the stakes and their wards and branches.¹⁵¹

- April 5: St. George Stake (with the First Presidency and eleven of the Twelve Apostles in attendance); President John D. T. McAllister;¹⁵² wards organized in subsequent meetings, total fourteen wards, twenty-three branches

145. Brigham Young Jr., Journals, March 30, 1877, 17:211 [image 217], holograph, Brigham Young Jr. Journals and Papers, 1862–1902, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/8c2738f6-be3b-4c2d-95bd-10250dfd657d/0/0>.

146. Richards, Journal, [March 30, 1877](#), vol. 25, image 123.

147. Woodruff, “Journal (January 1, 1873–February 7, 1880),” [April 5–7, 1877](#).

148. Hartley, “Priesthood Reorganization of 1877,” 234.

149. “General Conference at St. George,” *Deseret News*, April 11, 1877, 156 [image 12], <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2626313>.

150. Annals of the Southern Utah Mission, April 5–6, 1877, *Book B Continuation*, 75; “Two Days’ Meetings at St. George,” *Deseret News*, April 11, 1877, 12, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2626313>.

151. See Mormon Places website (<https://mormonplaces.byu.edu/>) for details and sources for the (re)organization of each ward in all these stakes.

152. “General Conference at St. George,” 156 [image 12].

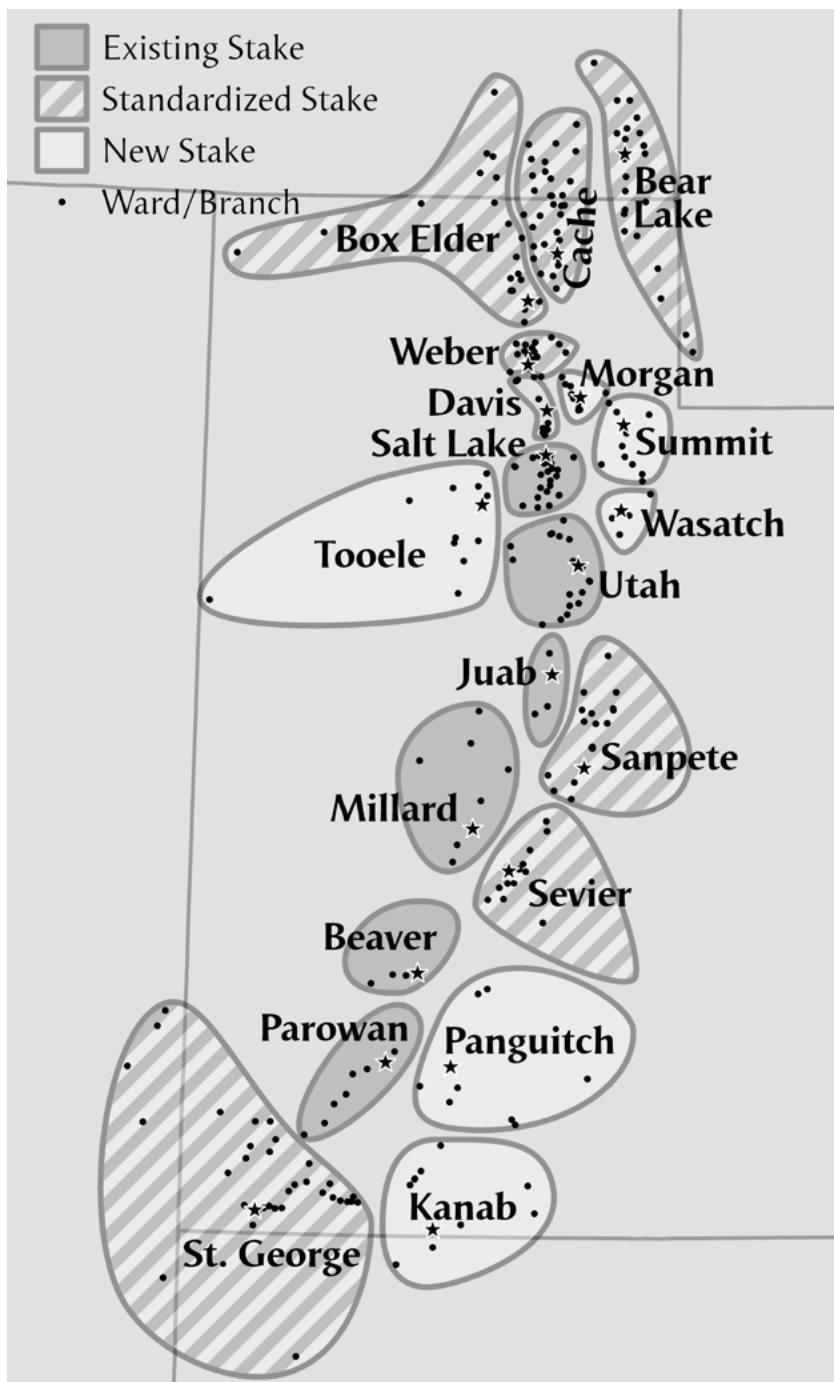


FIGURE 8. The 1877 Priesthood Reorganization.

- April 18: **Kanab Stake** (by Apostles Taylor, Pratt, L. Snow, and E. Snow);¹⁵³ President L. John Nuttall (Kanab bishop); wards organized in subsequent meetings; six wards (four new), two branches
- April 18: **Parowan Stake** (by the First Presidency);¹⁵⁴ reorganization deferred
- April 23: **Panguitch Stake** (by Apostles Taylor, Pratt, L. Snow, and E. Snow);¹⁵⁵ President James Henrie; five wards (four new), two branches
- May 12: **Salt Lake Stake** (by First Presidency and seven Apostles);¹⁵⁶ President Angus M. Cannon (existing); wards reorganized in subsequent meetings, thirty-five wards (ten new), three branches
- May 25: **Cache Stake** (by First Presidency and six Apostles);¹⁵⁷ President Moses Thatcher; wards reorganized in subsequent meetings; twenty-three wards (three new), seven branches
- May 25: **Weber Stake** (by First Presidency and six Apostles);¹⁵⁸ President David H. Peery. May 28: organized sixteen wards (all new, most from former districts, adding Ogden 4th Ward), two branches
- June 5: **Utah Stake** (by Presidents Brigham Young and John W. Young, and Apostles Taylor, E. Snow, Richards, and Cannon);¹⁵⁹ President Abraham O. Smoot (existing); sixteen wards (three new), one branch

153. “Two Days’ Meetings—Organization of the Kanab Stake of Zion,” *Deseret News*, May 16, 1877, 10, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2626732>.

154. Parowan Ward general minutes, vol. 6, 1872–1887, pp. 127–128 [images 128–129] (April 18, 1877), holograph, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/8e405e62-6bd2-4c3b-8f80-8719e52e24ba/0/127>. Brigham Young’s proposal to replace longtime-president William H. Dame with Jesse N. Smith was objected to, so it was not reorganized at this time; see July 29.

155. Panguitch Stake organization report, April 22–23, 1877, 2, holograph, Historian’s Office Minutes and Reports (Local Units), <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/82f0d4b8-1c6f-4492-ac45-db168e73982b/0/0>.

156. “Special Conference,” *Deseret News*, May 16, 1877, 12, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2626737>.

157. “Special Conference at Logan,” *Deseret News*, May 30, 1877, 1, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2626837>; G. F. Gibbs, “Discourse by Prest. Brigham Young,” *Deseret News*, June 6, 1877, 2, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2626931>.

158. “Special Conference at Ogden,” *Deseret Evening News*, May 29, 1877, 2, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=23167155>.

159. “Special Conference at Provo,” *Deseret News*, June 13, 1877, 15, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2627051>.

- June 16: **Davis Stake** (by Presidents Brigham Young and Cannon, and Apostle Taylor);¹⁶⁰ President William R. Smith (bishop of Centerville); wards reorganized in subsequent meetings; eight wards (three new, including Bountiful divided into three wards)
- June 23–25: **Tooele Stake** (by Apostles Taylor, L. Snow, E. Snow, Richards, Cannon);¹⁶¹ Pres. Francis M. Lyman; six wards (all new), 2–4 branches
- July 1: **Juab Stake** (by Presidents Young and John W. Young, Apostles Hyde, E. Snow, Cannon, and Young);¹⁶² President George Teasdale; four wards total (three new, including Nephi divided into two)
- July 1: **Morgan Stake** (by Apostles L. Snow and Richards);¹⁶³ President Willard G. Smith (bishop of Morgan); eight wards (seven new), three branches
- July 8–9: **Summit Stake** (by Apostles Taylor, L. Snow, and Richards);¹⁶⁴ President William W. Cluff (presiding bishop); ten wards (eight new), one branch
- July 11: *Circular of the First Presidency* issued, documenting the reorganization policy¹⁶⁵
- July 15: **Sevier Stake** (by Apostles Hyde and E. Snow);¹⁶⁶ President Franklin Spencer (bishop of Salina); eleven wards (four new, including Richfield divided into two), two wards became dependent branches

160. “Conference at Farmington,” *Deseret News*, June 20, 1877, 12, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2627187>.

161. “Organization at Tooele,” *Deseret News*, July 4, 1877, 3, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2627294>.

162. “Juab County,” *Deseret News*, July 4, 1877, 9, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2627279>.

163. “Organization at Morgan,” *Deseret News*, July 11, 1877, 2, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2627360>. The report did not clearly list dependent branches, but three were known to exist in subsequent years.

164. “Organization of Summit Stake,” *Deseret Evening News*, July 16, 1877, 3, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=23167356>.

165. Brigham Young, John W. Young, and Daniel H. Wells, *Circular of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City, 1877), <https://ia802302.us.archive.org/15/items/circularoffirstp00unse/circularoffirstp00unse.pdf>.

166. “Conference and Organization,” *Deseret News*, August 8, 1877, 14, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2627721>.

- July 14–15: **Wasatch Stake** (by Apostles Taylor and Richards);¹⁶⁷ President Abram Hatch (presiding bishop); six wards (all new), one branch
- July 22: **Millard Stake** (by Apostles Woodruff and E. Snow);¹⁶⁸ President Ira N. Hinckley; eight wards (five new, including Fillmore divided into two)
- July 25–26: **Beaver Stake** (by Apostles Woodruff and E. Snow);¹⁶⁹ President John R. Murdock (existing); five wards (none new)
- July 29: **Parowan Stake** (by Apostles Woodruff and E. Snow); no permanent president sustained; seven wards (one new), two branches¹⁷⁰
- August 5: **Sanpete Stake** (by First Presidency and Apostles Hyde and E. Snow);¹⁷¹ President Canute Peterson (bishop of Ephraim); eighteen wards (ten new, including Mt. Pleasant, Manti, and Ephraim divided into two)
- August 19: **Box Elder Stake** (by First Presidency and Apostles Taylor, Richards, Carrington, and L. Snow); President Oliver G. Snow; seventeen wards (thirteen new, including Brigham City divided into four), three branches¹⁷²
- August 25–26: **Bear Lake Stake** (by Apostles Taylor, L. Snow, Richards, Carrington, and Rich); President William Budge (former presiding bishop); eighteen wards (one new, Paris 2nd Ward), five branches¹⁷³

167. “Wasatch Stake,” *Deseret News*, July 25, 1877, 1, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2627504>.

168. “Millard County Stake,” *Deseret News*, August 1, 1877, 8, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2627601>.

169. “Beaver Stake,” *Deseret News*, August 1, 1877, 16, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2627645>.

170. As on April 18, the members were still divided between William H. Dame and Jesse N. Smith for president, so the rest of the stake was organized without calling a president. See “Stake Organized,” *Deseret News*, August 15, 1877, 9, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2627784>. It was not until March 1878 that Elder Snow officially returned Dame to the presidency, with Smith as first counselor. Parowan Ward general minutes, March 24, 1878, 6:152 [image 151].

171. “Organization in Sanpete,” *Deseret News*, August 15, 1877, 1, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2627751>.

172. “Brigham City Conference,” *Deseret News*, August 22, 1877, 12, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2627889>.

173. “Local and Other Matters: Special Conference,” *Deseret News*, September 5, 1877, 1, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2628089>.

- August 29: Brigham Young's death¹⁷⁴

The first public hint of this broader initiative was in Parowan on April 18, where Brigham Young said, "We have begun at St. George to reorganize the people."¹⁷⁵ This meeting also held the first hint of general policy, as he mentioned in passing that there would be no presiding bishops in the stakes. On the same day in Kanab, Erastus Snow also introduced the coming initiative: "It seems to be the mind of President Young and the rest of us that the stakes of Zion be more thoroughly (and in some places new ones) organized. The people are increasing and spreading abroad on the right and on the left on the north and more especially on the south."¹⁷⁶ By the time of the Salt Lake conference in May, the plan was clearly a major public initiative. Elder George Q. Cannon mentions the "more thorough organization of the Church, which was about to be effected by the Apostles through the various stakes of Zion."¹⁷⁷

What were the most likely reasons for this major undertaking? In the July *Circular of the First Presidency* itself, there is a clear undercurrent that the added organization and better recordkeeping would make sure nobody is forgotten, "that every family, no matter how far removed from settlements, is recognized and numbered with the people of the nearest ward."¹⁷⁸

The best evidence of rationale for the Reorganization can be gleaned from the sermons given by the First Presidency and the Twelve in the reorganization conferences. These sermons followed several common themes: (1) the current variety of practices was messy and confusing; (2) the growth of the Church necessitated changes in policy and practice from time to time; (3) this reorganization was dictated by a prophet of God (some specifically mentioning a revelation); (4) the newly standardized practice was in accordance with scripture; and (5) the clearer organizations should enable members to be better disciples.

A good example was given by John Taylor at the Davis Stake organization in June:

174. "Death of President Brigham Young," *Deseret News*, September 5, 1877, 8, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2628112>.

175. Parowan Ward general minutes, April 18, 1877, 6:127 [image 128].

176. Kanab Ward, Kanab Stake, Kanab Ward General Minutes, 9:112, Church History Library.

177. "Special Conference," *Deseret News*, May 16, 1877, 12, <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2626737>.

178. Young, Young, and Wells, *Circular of the First Presidency*, 1.

Our President has been moved upon to call upon the Twelve to go through the Territory and attend to these matters, in accordance with a revelation which makes it the duty of the Twelve “to ordain and set in order all the [. . .] officers of the Church;”¹⁷⁹ to see that the Church is “righted up” in all its various departments, and in the organization of its various quorums. . . . We have found more or less confusion among the churches wherever we have gone; and hence the wisdom manifested by the President in requesting a more perfect organization seems the more to be appreciated, because of the necessity that exists for improvement.¹⁸⁰

It appears that some of the details gradually emerged over the next few months. This might explain why the official policy was not published until July, when the process was more than halfway completed.

Conclusion

The 1877 Reorganization did not set up an administration identical to that of today. Some practices would be phased out decades later, such as dependent branches, mission conferences, and having a separate stake presidency and high priest quorum presidency. However, the basic local administrative structure of bishop-led wards, presidency-led branches, stakes, and priesthood quorums has survived to the present. Even the sweeping changes of the Correlation Era of the 1960s and 1970s¹⁸¹ and the practices recently introduced during the presidency of Russell M. Nelson (such as ward ministering, two-hour Sunday meetings, disaffiliation from scouting, delegation from bishops to ward Relief Societies and elders’ quorums, a new youth program) have not been as fundamental.

The development of local administration prior to 1877 was not a simple linear advancement from novel, experimental forms in the early years directly to the mature form we see today. Among the earliest organizational structures were some that still exist (such as branches and bishops). New ideas were still being developed into the 1870s, and some wards and stakes backtracked from a modern form into something different.

Neither was the development a case of revelation gone awry, where revealed doctrine did not work in practice and had to be changed. Very

179. Taylor is quoting D&C 107:58, not a new revelation to Brigham Young.

180. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:51–52 (June 17, 1877).

181. Gregory A. Prince and Wm. Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (University of Utah Press, 2005), 139–58.

few details of the policies before or after 1877 were ever claimed to be “ordained by God.” This includes the branch-stake continuum ideal that emerged in Kirtland and Nauvoo and gradually faded in Utah until it died in the 1860s. Both Joseph and Brigham portrayed the branch continuum as a logical application of scripture but did not directly claim divine approval of it. The revealed principles and offices found in the Doctrine and Covenants, especially those spelled out in sections 20 and 107, are as applicable to today’s post-1877 administrative structure as they were to the various pre-1877 structures.

We should not be surprised that practices in the Church have changed over time. Even though core doctrine should not change, and some of the application of doctrine as policy seems set in stone (the stone in this case being the 1877 Reorganization), policies and practices continue to change today. It is an unavoidable fact that as the Church has grown, as the world around it has changed, and as the members have varied in their ability to live the gospel, that gospel has been and will continue to be practiced in different ways. As Orson Pratt stated at the Cache Stake reorganization in May 1877, “To say that there will be a stated time, in the history of this Church, during its imperfections and weakness, when the organization will be perfect, and that there will be no further extension or addition to the organization, would be a mistake. Organization is to go on, step after step, from one degree to another, just as the people increase and grow in the knowledge of the principles and laws of the kingdom of God, and as their borders shall extend.”¹⁸²

Ultimately, the organization of the Church should not be viewed as an end unto itself but rather as a means of organizing ministry efforts. At the Davis Stake organization in June 1877, Brigham Young answered why the quorums must be set in order, stating, “Paul says, ‘For the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.’ But whether this will be the result here I do not know. All I know is that it should be so, and if every one does his duty and lives his religion, it will be so.”¹⁸³

Note: If you are interested in researching this era further, detailed organizational histories of each of the wards, branches, and stakes discussed in this series can be found at the MormonPlaces website: <https://>

182. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:12 (May 20, 1877); “Special Conference at Logan,” *Deseret News*, May 30, 1877, 1.

183. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:43 (June 17, 1877).

mormonplaces.byu.edu/. We welcome any corrections and sources you find in your own research. Also, we have published the research notes for this series, in the form of timelines for each stake with quotes and sources, on the site: <https://mormonplaces.byu.edu/research.html>.

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“Fearless in the Cause of Truth”

The Journals of Heber J. Grant

Scott D. Marianno

A determined Heber J. Grant surveyed American readers from the cover of *Time* on April 7, 1930. The hand-drawn sketch of the seventh President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints approximated Grant's real-life visage: thin, bearded, bespectacled, with a fading, snow-white hairline. To mark the centennial of the founding of the American-born faith, *Time* elected to feature Grant as a bridge between the past and future of the Church. “Tall, bewhiskered, graced with patriarchal kindness,” Grant was not the repressive leader of a backwards sect of religious deviants in Utah. Those largely nineteenth-century caricatures had softened into a more recent American success story presided over by Grant. He still played the role of “divinely authorized President, Prophet, Seer and Revelator,” according to *Time*, but he also successfully guided the Church to assets exceeding three million dollars. “Mormon wealth . . . is apparent to anyone who studies Salt Lake City commercially,” the author wrote, and “big Mormon names appear on the boards of practically every important enterprise in Utah, but none more often than that of Heber Jedediah Grant.” Grant was a business magnate—a capitalist success story worthy of admiration by his fellow citizens—as he captained an “American religion” of over seven hundred thousand members, so the article reasoned.¹

1. “The American Religion: The Mormon Centenary and Utah,” *Time*, April 7, 1930, 26–28, 30.

Grant's arrival on the public scene as an American success story was not inevitable from his youth. Born as Heber Jedd Grant² "in Salt Lake City, Utah, on November 22, 1856, to Rachel Ridgeway Ivins and Jedediah M. Grant," young Heber quickly faced challenges. His father was second counselor in the First Presidency and a fierce defender of then-President Brigham Young's ambitious reformation of Latter-day Saint religious life across Utah Territory, known eventually as the "Mormon Reformation."³ An exhausted Jedediah Grant died of pneumonia "just nine days after Heber's birth." Grant was now fatherless and impoverished. Yet his father's religious legacy mixed well with his mother's determination to cradle Grant in a climate of survival, resilience, and intense adherence to religious truth.⁴ Rachel raised Grant on her own and worked tirelessly to earn enough to support him.⁵

Grant developed his own dreams and ambitions, but they were born within the larger Latter-day Saint story as he came of age in the 1870s and '80s when the Church's temporal success was far from guaranteed. The financial peril he experienced in his childhood nurtured an interest in business and entrepreneurship that would simultaneously fuel and torture Grant throughout his life. His work ethic and commitment to religious principles was unimpeachable, but he also took financial risks that led to mounting debt and periods of his life where his physical health eroded alongside his financial well-being. In an era where Church leaders often sought outside income sources to supplement their living allowance, Grant exhausted himself working to meet his own expectations.⁶ There was irony, then, in the 1930 article by *Time*. Grant never

2. Jedediah M. Grant was known as "Jeddy" in his youth. The name was formally given to Heber J. Grant upon his birth to honor his father. See Ronald W. Walker, *Qualities That Count: Heber J. Grant as Businessman, Missionary, and Apostle* (BYU Studies, 2004), 2.

3. Gustive O. Larsen, "The Mormon Reformation," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1958): 45–63; Jedediah M. Grant, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool, 1855–56), 3:60–61, (July 13, 1855).

4. Jeff Morley, Scott Marianno, and Audrey Dunshee, "Heber J. Grant Journals Now Available Digitally in the Church History Catalog," Church History, February 17, 2025, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/blog/heber-j-grant-journals-now-available-digitally-in-the-church-history-catalog>.

5. See Ronald W. Walker, "Rachel R. Grant: The Continuing Legacy of the Feminine Ideal," *Dialogue* 15, no. 3 (1982): 105–21.

6. Thomas G. Alexander, "Church Administrative Change in the Progressive Period, 1898–1930," in *A Firm Foundation: Church Organization and Administration*, ed. David J. Whittaker and Arnold K. Garr (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Deseret Book, 2011), 312; Walker, *Qualities that Count*, 115–18.



FIGURE 1. Heber J. Grant delivering Utah's first public radio address, May 6, 1922. Courtesy Church History Library.

truly arrived as a successful business magnate if measured by his own personal assets but carried aspirations for such throughout much of his Church service.

Navigating the boom-and-bust financial cycles endemic to the nineteenth-century United States (especially the American West) shaped Grant for prolonged Church service. Indeed, many of the qualities Grant displayed later in life were rooted in his early struggles. Though Grant nurtured deep familial ties to the Church's founding and its religious principles, he presided over the Church during a period of significant transition and modernization (fig. 1). He was called to the apostleship in 1882 and entered polygamy in 1884.⁷ As he aged, he helped guide the Church's shift away from the communal economics of the nineteenth century and toward the capitalist ethos of the twentieth century. By the time he became Church President in 1918, Grant was a monogamist. His plural wives Lucy and Emily preceded him in death;

7. Walker, *Qualities That Count*, 176.

only Augusta was still at his side. He devoted the early portion of his presidency to rooting out polygamists who failed to abide the Church's pivot away from the practice.⁸ He reasserted the Church's commitment to the scriptural mandate of the Word of Wisdom as an individual health code.⁹ He also sought to foster Church growth in other areas outside the Great Basin, like California. Over the course of his twenty-six years as prophet and President of the Church, he weathered the storms of the Great Depression and the onset of World War II. With his fellow leaders in the Quorum of the Twelve and First Presidency, he launched the Church Security Program, the first modern Churchwide welfare system to address the financial effects of the Great Depression on individual members.¹⁰ His own sense of religious duty, mixed with memories of his own poverty in childhood, rendered him an advocate for the widow, orphan, and the impoverished. Any depiction then of Grant as simply a model American business leader or the epitome of American financial success misses the personal wrestle that molded Grant into a devoted leader of the Latter-day Saint people and one equipped to guide the Church into the future.

In February 2025, the Church History Department released the complete journals of Heber J. Grant online through the Church History Library catalog. Grant's collective journals span sixteen archival boxes (eight linear feet) and over fifty individual volumes, along with other unbound journals. In size, they represent one of the best-kept journals by a Church President of the twentieth century and carry similarities to the comprehensiveness of journals kept by Presidents Wilford Woodruff and Spencer W. Kimball. A detailed read of Grant's journals unmasks the growth, struggles, and contributions of a critical and transitional figure in the twentieth-century Church.

The Journals

Heber J. Grant's journals are part of a larger collection of Grant's papers spanning 197 archival boxes housed at the Church History Library.

8. See Ken Driggs, "Twentieth-Century Polygamy and Fundamentalist Mormons in Southern Utah," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 24, no. 4 (1991): 45–47.

9. James H. Wallis, "President Grant—Defender of the Word of Wisdom, Champion of Prohibition," *Improvement Era*, November 1936, 696–98.

10. For more on the Church Security Program, see Joseph F. Darowski, "'The Lord's Way': The Genesis of the Church Security Plan, 1920–36," in *Business and Religion: The Intersection of Faith and Finance*, ed. Matthew G. Godfrey and Michael Hubbard MacKay (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2019), 339–54.

Most of the papers consist of Grant's personal, business, and ecclesiastical correspondence.¹¹ Efforts are underway to release the entirety of Grant's papers digitally. The release of Grant's journals coincides with a policy change permitting the release of the papers of General Authorities and officers of the Church seventy years after their death (to protect confidentiality and the privacy of individuals mentioned in the journals). Other archival collections released under this policy include the papers of Wilford Woodruff, Emmeline B. Wells, Joseph F. Smith, and Anthon H. Lund.¹²

The digital release of Grant's journals included images with redaction applied by staff at the Church History Library according to the library's access policy.¹³ Little of the applied redaction pertained to Grant himself; instead, details about the private confessions of others, Church discipline, and temple ceremonies were carefully redacted to be minimally intrusive to the comprehensiveness of the overall record. In many instances, names were redacted while still preserving details about the historical setting. Thus, researchers can view online almost the entirety of Grant's journals for the first time.

Before the digital release of the journals, scholars who were granted selective access to Grant's physical journals held by the Church History Department excerpted the records for their own use. The most notable use of the journals was by Ronald W. Walker, who published a series of articles on Grant's life with intentions to produce a comprehensive biography of the Church President.¹⁴ Walker's initial work on Grant started in the late 1970s at the directive of Church Historian Leonard Arrington, before Walker transferred to Brigham Young University.¹⁵ Shifting access policies within the department prevented widespread

11. See Heber J. Grant, *Heber J. Grant Collection, 1852–1945* (bulk 1880–1945), Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/record/0788b1a9-96d1-481f-8f0b-0d5a85c7055a/0?view=summary>.

12. Morley, Marianno, and Dunshee, "Heber J. Grant Journals Now Available Digitally."

13. "Church History Department Historical Records Access Policy," Church History, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed August 4, 2025, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/content/library/access>.

14. For a sampling of Walker's work on Grant, see Walker, *Qualities That Count*. Before his death in 2016, Walker invited Church History Department historian Jed Woodworth to use his research materials to produce a biography of Heber J. Grant. That project is ongoing as of publication of this article.

15. Walker, *Qualities That Count*, xi.

use of the journals by others, leaving Walker's research notes within his personal papers (now housed at the L. Tom Perry Special Collections in the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University) as the closest representation of the content in Grant's journals.¹⁶

An abridgement of Grant's journals was also privately published in 2010. The source text was not verified from the original journals but compiled from excerpts found in the research papers of other scholars like D. Michael Quinn and Scott G. Kenney and only represented a fraction of the total content of the journals.¹⁷ Such source trading of type-scripts was common practice for the time and has led to the proliferation of approximate versions of Grant's journals, promoted by the inaccessibility of the originals. Beyond textual verification, examining the original journals presents other advantages, including an understanding of the iterative nature of Grant's journal composition.

Grant feared his recordkeeping was of little value, yet he persisted in part out of a haunting duty to record his thoughts. Of his early journal-keeping efforts in 1884, Grant remarked: "I sometimes feel almost like stopping the writing of a journal as my grammar is so poor also my spelling that I dislike to leave any such a record as I have to make under the circumstances." He continued, "I am of the opinion that it is almost a matter of duty that I keep a journal and this is the main reason I am willing to do so." Grant's sense of duty was partially born out of his childhood circumstances. "I would be willing to pay any reasonable amount of money for a record of father's life," he lamented, "but he never recorded any of his acts, and there is today nothing worthy of mention on record regarding him."¹⁸ He also interacted with and admired men in Church leadership who kept regular journals, including Wilford Woodruff, George Q. Cannon, and Francis M. Lyman. He never outran the feeling that he was failing in his personal promise to keep a better record, despite the volumes of journals that grew out of his daily activities. In 1915, he recorded another personal impression to improve his journal keeping:

I opened the Doctrine and Covenants with a prayer in my heart that I might turn to some passages from which I could gain some comfort. I first opened to section 108, verse 3, which reads as follows: "And arise

16. See Ronald W. Walker Papers Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

17. See *The Diaries of Heber J. Grant, 1880–1945 Abridged* (n.p., 2010).

18. Heber J. Grant, Journal, January 9, 1884, 7:3 [image 7], holograph, Grant Collection, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/45ec914e-48a1-4042-8981-f8e3503c5c95/0/0>.

up and be more careful henceforth, in observing your vows which you have made, and do make, and you shall be blessed with exceeding great blessings." It impressed me. I really feel that I have been very careless all my life in promising myself to do certain work, especially with reference to my journal. Time and again I have declared that I would keep it up and yet I neglect it often for weeks or even months at a stretch.¹⁹

Grant's uneven early recordkeeping caused his corpus of journals to develop in fits and starts. His recordkeeping was iterative, and his style shifted as he aged (and as he acquired more resources and experience). The extant volumes of Grant's journals were filed and described by archivists within the Church History Department as bound journals, letterpress copybooks, and unbound journals. The series of bound journals consist primarily of daybooks and pocketbooks numbering thirty-eight volumes from 1880 to 1925. The letterpress journals span eight volumes from 1886 to 1898 and 1921 to 1922. The unbound journals comprise sheets of regular entries from 1886 to May 1945. A textual comparison of all of Grant's journals shows that his bound journals were later used to produce unbound typewritten and handwritten copies, some of which were subsequently pressed and duplicated into letterpress books.

Bound Journals

Heber J. Grant's first extant journal begins in October 1880 when Grant was just twenty-three, shortly after his call to serve as Tooele stake president. As a teenager, Grant worked in an insurance office where he developed excellent penmanship and communication skills.²⁰ Written in flowing, legible script, Grant's semifrequent early entries reflect a mixture of business and religious duties and are often disrupted by figures and calculations.²¹ The ink and Grant's own handwriting shift from day to day in some of the early volumes, suggesting that Grant may have carried the journals with him as he traveled.²² These early leather-bound volumes were more comprehensive than the daybooks and pocketbooks Grant used during the 1890s and onward (fig. 2). Collectively, the

19. Grant, Journal, December 3, 1915, image 315, typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/57b3e28a-015d-453c-a957-653ff07bf804/0/0>.

20. Walker, *Qualities that Count*, 88.

21. See Grant, journal, 2:75–81, [images 79–85], holograph, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/371ae369-4c97-41cf-bfb4-b57ec915ba86/0/81>.

22. See Grant, Journal, 3:[ii], image 4, holograph, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/219e0ad8-9d43-4f3f-b4b6-7c00d652457f/0/3>.

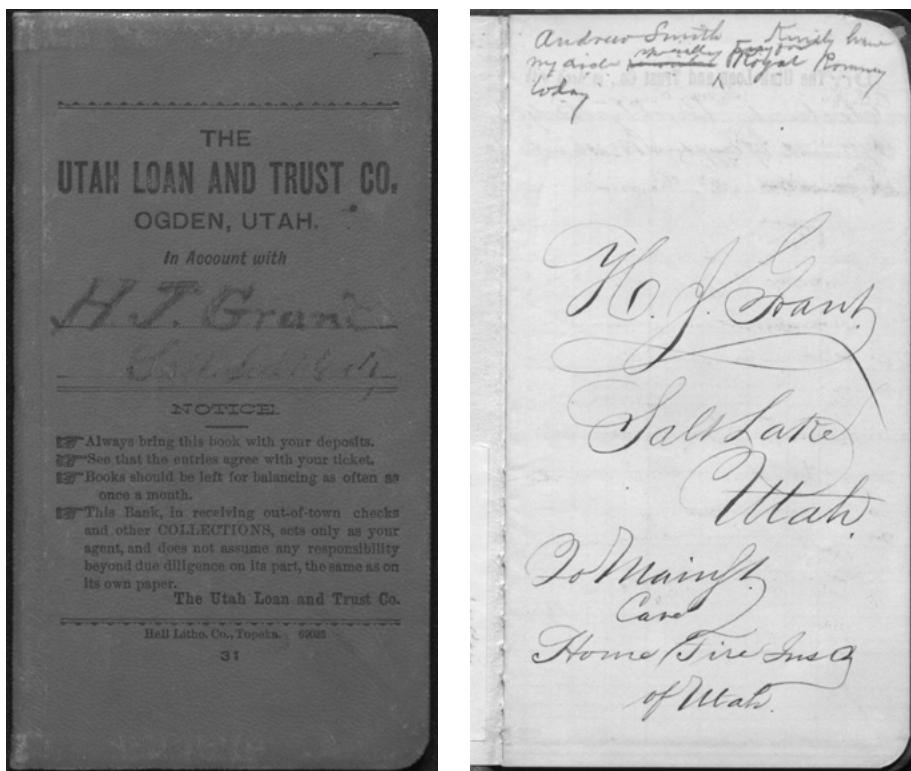


FIGURE 2. Heber J. Grant daybook, July to August 1899, cover and title page. Courtesy Church History Library.

leatherbound journals, pocketbooks, and daybooks represent the best approximation of Grant's day-to-day activities from 1880 to 1925.

Grant's bound journals are numbered sequentially in consistent pencil markings, suggesting that someone labeled the volumes to chronologize and organize them after they were written.²³ Markings in later daybooks suggest copying entries for other iterations of the journal (fig. 3).²⁴ Grant utilized employees and family to do the work of copying his notes into more readable entries. His bound journals are not comprehensive. For example, typewritten, unbound entries exist for his journals from 1893 to 1896 where no corresponding bound journal survived.²⁵

23. Grant, Journal, 3:[i], image 3.

24. Grant, Journal, January 1, 1910, 24:1 [image 5], holograph, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/cd09939f-72cc-450c-beef-ec04b95fc097/0/4>.

25. See, for example, Grant, Journal, 1894 January–December, typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/b0b5cd95-52c4-4923-a8a3-f1795f8632e7/0/0>.

In another instance, on January 1, 1883, Grant recorded that he had “been so busy of late” that he “neglected [his] journal” and “concluded to start a new journal today and fill this one up from Nov 27/82 to January 1/83 as opportunity will allow.” He had “pencil memorandums for most of the data” and could recover some of his daily happenings from November to December 1882. Outside of recording the revelation from President John Taylor calling him to the apostleship in October 1882, Grant left the rest of his 1882 journal blank, never returning to record the missing information for the first few months of his apostolic service.²⁶

Letterpress Journals

Grant also reproduced journal entries in letterpress copybooks beginning in the 1880s. Letterpress books, composed of bound pages of thin tissue paper, were mostly used for transferring correspondence through a process requiring moisture and a press. Authors were able to retain a copy of their writings for filing in their offices or homes. Grant duplicated some of his journal entries to circulate them among his fellow members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. When Apostle Anthon H. Lund was serving as president of the European Mission from 1893 to 1896, for example, Grant sent Lund entries containing important minutes and decisions by the Twelve to keep him apprised of Church business.²⁷ These copies

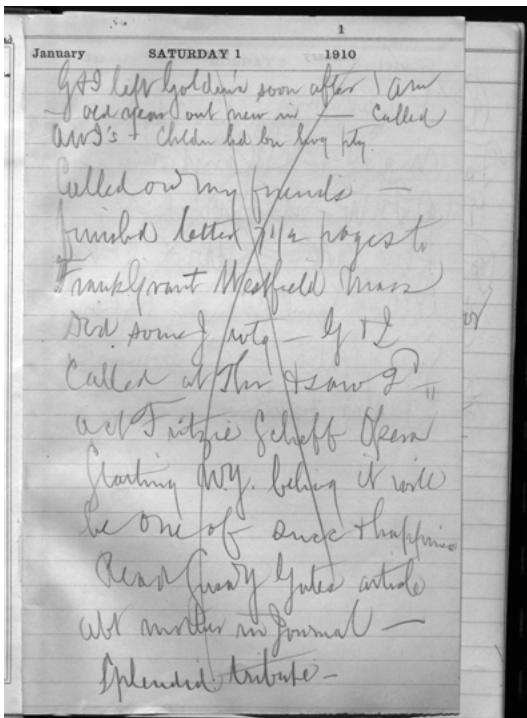


FIGURE 3. Grant journal entry from January 1, 1910. Courtesy Church History Library.

26. Grant, Journal, January 1, 1883, 5:84 [image 88], and October 16, 1882, 5:90–96 [images 94–100], holograph, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/5413afa4-bd85-47bb-b3e5-0886f6d5f023/0/87>.

27. See Heber J. Grant to Anthon H. Lund, Esq., September 26, 1893, image 1, typescript, Anthon H. Lund Papers, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/20f25f87-5bf1-4826-b6b1-5406917bb6c9/0/0>.

were direct reproductions from his letterpress journals. Only eight volumes of letterpress copybooks exist in Grant's collection of papers. Four volumes span the years 1886 to January 1898 while two volumes span 1921 to 1922. Grant maintained his correspondence in a similar fashion, but far more robustly, producing over eighty volumes of handwritten and type-written letterpress correspondence. Most of Grant's letterpress entries are typed and copied over from Grant's series of unbound journals.

Unbound Journals

The byproduct of producing letterpress copies of his journals was a series of unbound pages that Grant initially thought of destroying after he duplicated them. In July 1887, Grant began the production of his letterpress volumes retroactively, hoping such efforts would tidy his journal-keeping process. He failed to keep a journal for 1886 and sought to recover his daily activities from his own correspondence and from his "friends" in the Quorum of the Twelve, including Francis M. Lyman.²⁸ Once pages were copied into the letterpress journal, Grant saw little reason to retain the copy but could not bring himself to destroy the pages. He stored the source material for his 1886 letterpress journal in his "desk at home."²⁹ This set off a process that would influence Grant's record-keeping for the remainder of his life.

Most of Grant's letterpress and unbound journals are typed. His record-keeping process formalized as he aged and as he acquired resources to assist him. In the 1880s, he deployed the use of a typewriter in the management of his businesses and eventually adopted the technology in 1887 to aid his journal keeping (using his own clerks to produce dictated journal entries).³⁰ Grant loathed the time expended to record his own entries. "I [like] to work," he wrote in 1911, "but do not like to sit down and write a record of what I have been doing no matter how brief it is."³¹ He often elected to draft quick notes of his entries

28. Grant, Journal, July 4, 1887, images 1–2, holograph, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/183a7fc4-af9-4650-9a58-1d1144c2a41l/0/0>.

29. Grant, Journal, vol. 1, image 2, holograph, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/63bc978b-8c04-4b01-8378-13295fe24afl/0/0>.

30. Grant noted that he had his "clerk mark these duplicates," referring to the entries on pages 105–7, which were presumably typed copies of the originals. Grant, Journal, 1887 January 20–May 21, 105 [image 9], typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/dd167e1c-f5e1-464f-95d5-8c3795bb0914/0/8>.

31. Grant, Journal, July 27, 1911, image 99, holograph, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/af4d2e08-015d-4a21-b7ba-654a67abb2e2/0/98>.

which he then had typed by his wife Augusta.³² Occasionally, his entries were typed in bulk from dictation. For years, he used his associate at Grant and Co., Frederick Barker, to type dictated entries, including in 1911 when he initially neglected to produce a journal from the beginning of the year until the end of June.³³

Grant favored a dictation machine to help him produce correspondence and journal entries, often remaining awake into the early morning hours to record his thoughts. Such nighttime thoughts ranged from the unguarded and vulnerable to the routine enumeration of his daily schedule. He accumulated wax cylinders that could be played and transcribed by others.³⁴ Grant's journals after 1922 represent the best efforts of Joseph Anderson, his personal secretary, to capture his day-to-day life from dictation.³⁵

These unbound journals from 1922 until his death in 1945 are the only daily record of Grant's service as Church President. Unlike the unbound draft copies used for Grant's letterpress volumes, his later journals were written on high quality, personalized paper that explicitly identified the compilation as Grant's personal journal and featured stamped, sequential numbering (fig. 4).³⁶

Beginning in July 1943, due to Grant's diminishing health, his entries began documenting his daily correspondence rather than his daily activities. They relied more on the office knowledge of Grant's secretary rather than regular input of Grant himself.³⁷ The entry dated May 9, 1945, written just five days before his death, recorded the correspondence signed and sent out by the First Presidency after which his journal fell silent.³⁸ As his journals had long since acquired a third-party narrator, they revealed very little about the final days of Grant's life. Taken cumulatively,

32. Grant, Journal, November 9, 1909, image 169, typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/b44c6105-906f-437b-afb8-1a50bf324d28/0/0>.

33. Grant, Journal, July 27, 1911, image 99; Grant, Journal, November 9, 1909, image 169.

34. Grant, Journal, January 13, 1936, 8 [image 52], typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/547875ef-781f-4bef-8c4a-c10a1eb17a3b/0/0>.

35. See Grant, Journal, February 27, 1943, 50 [image 100], typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/06fd9c0a-2f34-4567-a212-2cc4b93863bf/0/0>; Grant, Journal, July 12 to November 3, 1943, 91 [image 141], typescript, Grant Collection.

36. See Grant, Journal, January 1, 1929, 1 [image 5], typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/d3b2ab0c-409a-4702-a196-5e11932e223/0/50>.

37. See Grant, Journal, July 1 to December 31, 1943, 87–89 [images 137–9], typescript; Grant, Journal, July 12 to November 3, 1943, 91 [image 141].

38. Grant, Journal, May 9, 1945, images 407–8, typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/a3ce90d5-3868-44a9-9278-800b1dc9a389/0/0>.

Los Angeles, Calif.,
Tuesday, January 1, 1929.

I arrived at Los Angeles this morning at 9:10. . . . I was met at the station by President McMurrin, my son-in-law, John H. Taylor, and Leo J. Muir. Brother Muir offered to drive me to Pasadena, but I preferred to have the secretary of the mission do so. John H. Taylor went with me and we attended the flower parade at Pasadena, which is a great show. Some of the flowers were very wonderful. It was very poorly managed, in my judgment. The delays between the floats were something frightful. We didn't even have time after it was supposed to have finished-- about noon to reach the football game on time. The football game between California and Georgia commenced at 2:15. Georgia won, the score being 8 to 7. It took us about an hour and a quarter, because of the automobile jamb, to get from the ball game to the home of my son-in-law, Isaac Blair Evans. John and I and the mission secretary were the guests of my son-in-law at the ball game. The tickets were \$5.00 each. I tried to get him to take the \$15.00 from me but he wouldn't do it. The mission secretary returned to Los Angeles and John and I spent the night at my son-in-law's. Had a very enjoyable evening, visiting with my daughter Grace and family. Found them all well and happy.

Before leaving Los Angeles I sent a telegram to my wife announcing our safe arrival and sending New Year's greetings. I also sent telegrams containing New Year's greetings to Isaac and June Stewart at Washington and to Clifford and my daughter Edith at American Fork.

Do not write in this binding space

Pasadena, California,
Wednesday, January 2, 1929.

I called this morning at the First National Bank with my son-in-law. They have a very fine bank room. Grace then drove John and me to Los Angeles, and we visited the Los Angeles Stake office with Brother Muir and the stake clerk, Brother Ursenbach.

Called at the Alexandria Hotel, and the proprietor, Mr. Chas. B. Hamilton, gave John and me a couple of fine rooms, one of them a sitting room, had a fine piano in it. He told one of the clerks to see that an extra bed was put up in the sitting room so that John and I would not have to sleep in the same room. He thought it would be pleasant for each of us to be in separate rooms.

At the hotel I met Brother Harrison Merrill and a number of the Brigham Young University basketball team.

Called on President Sartori of the Security & Trust Co., President Day of the Citizens National Bank, and other friends.

Had lunch with President Leo J. Muir and Brother E. J. Milne. I called on Mr. Fred Knickerbocker and other railroad officials. Met my brother Fred's grandson Del. Dictated letters to Senators

FIGURE 4. Grant journal entry from January 1, 1929. Courtesy Church History Library.

however, Grant's journals are a remarkable record into the daily life of a Church leader as he witnessed the transition and growth of the Church from the nineteenth century to nearly the mid-twentieth century.

Insights into the Life of Heber J. Grant

Call as an Apostle

By twenty-three years old, Grant had already shown initiative and drive, accumulating a lifetime of hard-earned lessons in just a handful of years as he aged into adulthood. In 1872, ever fearful he would lapse into poverty, Grant found employment at age fifteen as a clerk at H. R. Mann and Co., a fire insurance firm. By age nineteen, Grant owned his own firm with financial assistance from his mother, Rachel.³⁹ He began to make headway when his call as Tooele stake president in 1880 heaped ecclesiastical responsibilities upon his entrepreneurial priorities and divided his time. His new assignment took him out of Salt Lake City, the location of most of his business opportunities. Upon his appointment, Grant's childhood friend Richard W. Young, a grandson of Brigham Young, noted candidly to him that he was "financially . . . perhaps not to be congratulated but . . . finances sink into the most abject insignificance compared with the great compliment that has been paid your ability and the reward with which your faithfulness and integrity have met." Young predicted that the new responsibilities would be a "crusher to many of [Grant's] business plans."⁴⁰ His prediction swiftly proved correct as Grant's financial investments went sideways, and he found himself on the verge of a nervous breakdown within a year into his service.⁴¹

Still, others admired in Grant a strict adherence to virtue and obedience despite the crushing weight of his personal circumstances. In October 1881, another acquaintance, photographer Charles R. Savage, confided to Grant that he felt a call to the apostleship was in Grant's near future. "Put it down," he told Grant, "that within one year" his friend "would be a member of the Twelve Apostles." "I must confess," Grant recorded in his journal, "there is no honor in this world that I consider half so great as to be an apostle of God, and while it would fill my heart with joy that I can not possibly expressed [sic] to be considered by God

39. See Walker, *Qualities That Count*, 88.

40. Walker, *Qualities That Count*, 93; Richard W. Young to Heber J. Grant, November 8, 1880, 91 [image 96], holograph, Grant Collection, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/30686e99-dc5d-4e8f-99ea-82dc80473dea/0/0>.

41. Walker, *Qualities That Count*, 94–5.

as worthy [to] be one of his apostles, I must confess that my past life has not been such as to merit any such an honor." In a moment of private vulnerability, Grant wrote down his perceived weaknesses:

I have endeavor[ed] to live an honorable and a true life, that I have done many little things wrong. I am free to confess—I think the greatest wrong of my life has been the neglect to study the work of our Father in Heaven. I am comparatively [*sic*] ignorant of the principles of truth and the many things pertaining to the work of God on the Earth. I have an abiding faith in my heart of the truth of the gospel and have had many testimonies of God's goodness. I can not but think that my knowledge is so limited that I am hardly worthy to be a Pres[ident] of a stake in Zion let alone being one of God's apostles.⁴²

Business was paramount in Grant's early life, and he felt inadequate in his gospel knowledge when compared to the respected Church leaders he interacted with. Grant was just twenty-four at the time of Savage's prediction. Still, his strict adherence to gospel principles rendered him an option for the apostleship in the minds of others.

A year later, on Sunday evening, October 15, 1882, Grant received a telegram from Francis M. Lyman inviting him to travel from Tooele to Salt Lake City to meet in President Taylor's office the next day. What he did not seem to know about were the scheduled meetings the day before the telegram arrived announcing his call as an Apostle by revelation.⁴³ Grant, who was tending to prearranged business in the Tooele Stake, was absent Saturday morning when his fellow stake presidents heard a John Taylor revelation read aloud appointing Grant and George Teasdale to the Quorum of the Twelve and Seymour B. Young to the Presidency of the Seventy. The appointments were a preamble to a longer revelation about the organization of the priesthood. The revelation finally settled simmering differences about who should fill two vacancies in the Quorum of the Twelve that lingered past the recent October general conference where such appointments were customarily announced.⁴⁴

42. Grant, Journal, October 7, 1881, 3:160–3 [images 164–7], holograph, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/219e0ad8-9d43-4f3f-b4b6-7c00d652457f/0/163>.

43. Grant, Journal, October 16, 1882, 5:34 [image 38], holograph, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/5413afa4-bd85-47bb-b3e5-0886f6d5f023/0/37>; Walker, *Qualities That Count*, 95; The call to meet at President John Taylor's office on October 14, 1882, appeared in the *Deseret News*. "Presidents of Stakes," *Deseret News*, October 13, 1882, 3.

44. See Grant, Journal, October 14, 1882, 5:31 [image 35], holograph, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/5413afa4-bd85-47bb-b3e5-0886f6d5f023/0/34>; Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Christopher C. Jones, "John the Revelator": The Written

When Grant arrived at President Taylor's office on October 16, 1882, the First Presidency (John Taylor, George Q. Cannon, and Joseph F. Smith) were present along with seven members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, among others. George Reynolds, who served as secretary to the First Presidency, read the revelation to Grant and to the others assembled. Grant recorded the entirety of the revelation at the end of his 1882 journal and promised to record more thoughts on his call to the apostleship alongside the revelation but neglected to do so.⁴⁵

Grant would later recall publicly on multiple occasions (most notably in general conference) that the early months of his service were marked by self-doubt: "I can truthfully say that from October, 1882, until February, 1883, that spirit followed me day and night telling me that I was unworthy to be an Apostle of the Church, and that I ought to resign. When I would testify of my knowledge that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the Redeemer of mankind, it seemed as though a voice would say to me: 'You lie! You lie! You have never seen Him.'"⁴⁶

If Grant struggled initially in the early months of his apostolic service, he made little note of it in his journal (with no extant entries from November to December 1882). Part of Grant's initial call to serve



FIGURE 5. Heber J. Grant, 1883. Courtesy Church History Library.

Revelations of John Taylor," in *Champion of Liberty: John Taylor*, ed. Mary Jane Woodger (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009), 273–308, https://rsc.byu.edu/champion-liberty-john-taylor/john-revelator-written-revelations-john-taylor#_noteref-52; See also George Q. Cannon, Journal, October 14, 1882, The Church Historian's Press, accessed September 6, 2025, <https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/george-q-cannon/1880s/1882/10-1882>.

45. Grant, Journal, January 1, 1883, 5:84–9 [images 88–93], <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/5413afa4-bd85-47bb-b3e5-0886f6d5f023/0/87>.

46. Heber J. Grant, *One Hundred Eleventh Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1941), 4, <https://archive.org/details/conferencereport1941a/page/4/mode/2up>.

included a command to preach the gospel to the American Indians. Heeding the revelatory injunction in January 1883 (fig. 5), Grant left his home to fulfill a mission to the Southwestern United States and Mexico. Grant encountered trials on his first apostolic mission, including frigid winter weather, poor sleep, and the general taxing conditions inherent to long-distance travel in this era. His day-to-day log in his journal notes these conditions for early 1883.

However, retrospective accounts of his mission added a notable vision not found in his journal entries for the time that reassured him of the divinity of his call as an Apostle. In his April 1941 general conference address, Grant recollected that as he was “riding along” on Navajo land in February 1883, he “seemed to see, and . . . seemed to hear . . . a Council in Heaven.” He continued:

I listened to the discussion with a great deal of interest. The First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles had not been able to agree on two men to fill the vacancies in the Quorum of the Twelve. . . . In this Council the Savior was present, my father was there, and the Prophet Joseph Smith was there. They discussed the question that a mistake had been made in not filling those two vacancies and that in all probability it would be another six months before the Quorum would be completed, and they discussed as to whom they wanted to occupy the positions, and decided that the way to remedy the mistake that had been made in not filling those vacancies was to send a revelation. It was given to me that the Prophet Joseph Smith and my father mentioned me and requested that I be called to that position. I sat there and wept for joy. It was given to me that . . . I had lived a clean, sweet life. It was given to me that because of my father having practically sacrificed his life in what was known as the great Reformation, so to speak, of the people in early days, having been practically a martyr, that the Prophet Joseph and my father desired me to have that position, and it was because of their faithful labors that I was called, and not because of anything I had done of myself of any great thing that I had accomplished. It was also given to me that that was all these men, the Prophet and my father, could do for me; from that day it depended upon me and upon me alone as to whether I made a success of my life or a failure.⁴⁷

While the above prompting did not seem to answer any explicit anxiety contemporaneously noted by Grant in his 1883 journal about his

47. Grant, *One Hundred Eleventh Annual Conference*, 5. For information on the “Mormon Reformation,” referred to here as “the great Reformation,” see Paul H. Peterson, “[The Mormon Reformation](#)” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1981; BYU Studies, 2002).

calling, it aligns with his 1881 sentiments written after meeting C. R. Savage, when he concluded that he had amounted to nothing notable in life that would render him worthy of a higher ecclesiastical calling.⁴⁸ Grant lived constantly in the specter of his own father's apostolic service and hoped to build a similar legacy of obedience and Church service. He also possessed an anxious personality that constantly measured the fruits of his life against the self-imposed measuring stick of his own lofty expectations. In later years, his physical and mental health suffered from the daily rhythms of a taxing schedule, from financial insecurities, sometimes of his own creation, and from a well-intentioned sense of urgency to wear himself out in the service of the Lord.

Finances and Health

By the late 1880s, Grant had staked out a reputation among Church leaders as a knowledgeable and savvy businessman. The deteriorating finances of the Church, exacerbated by federal antipolygamy legislation and enforcement in the 1880s and by a nationwide financial panic in the 1890s, forced President Wilford Woodruff to deploy Grant to save the Church from its mounting debts. In 1893, financial conditions nationwide reached a precarious peak that precipitated runs on banks resulting in closures. With Church credit already stretched, Grant headed east to New York City to negotiate new loan terms to spare the Church from defaulting on its debts.⁴⁹

During an intense period of financial negotiations, Grant failed to keep a consistent daily record in his journal but recovered his activities through correspondence, which he reproduced in his unbound and letterpress journals for 1893. The entries reflected the escalating anxieties of Church leadership over their tenuous financial position. Church leaders wrote to Grant, hoping to reassure him in his efforts. For example, First Presidency counselor Joseph F. Smith wrote to Grant in July 1893, after months of attempts to secure loans, articulating his optimism that the Church would survive financially. He wrote, "For the first time, this month the Church could not pay its employees, nor the Presidency and Twelve. Well do not think I have lost hope—for I have not. I believe that Providence has something better in store for us than bank-ruptcy [sic] and ruin,

48. Grant, Journal, October 7, 1881, 3:160–3 [images 164–7], <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/219e0ad8-9d43-4f3f-b4b6-7c00d652457f/0/163>.

49. For more on Grant's trip to New York and Chicago during the Panic of 1893, see Walker, *Qualities That Count*, 115–42.

but it will be a close shave in my opinion. May the Lord help us.”⁵⁰ Grant’s own debts amounted to well over one hundred thousand dollars, which compounded his stress.⁵¹

His work came to a head in September when Utah’s banks faced certain closure if Grant did not secure the necessary resources to keep them open. Upon his return to Utah in October, Grant relayed to his fellow Apostles the razor-thin margins and stress he was operating under. He recorded his remarks in his journal.

I had had [a] telegram that [the banks in Salt Lake City] could not hope to survive until the following Wednesday when I had some prospects of making a loan of \$100.000. I did not tell the brethren that I had shed some bitter tears when I thought of the humiliation that was sure to come on the Church and aon [sic] the leading brethren in case the State and Zion’s banks had to close, but such was the case. Saturday morning Septr. 2nd. I got up after but two or three hours sleep and I recalled the blessing that I had had from Prest. Joseph F. Smith in which he had promised me that I should meet with success far beyond what I had expected and as I had not met with any sucess I told the brethren that I knelt down by my bed and asked the Lord [w]ith faith for a fulfillment of the promise of the servant of the Lord to me. I got up feeling cheerful and with an assurance that I should be blessed in getting the money that was needed and a feeling that it would be the mind and will of the Lord that our banks should close in case I was not able to get the money we needed.⁵²

Grant’s ability to secure loans amid a nationwide panic proved one of the major successes of his apostolic service, at least in the immediate context of the Church’s pressing financial distress. Grant stayed disaster for a season, but the consequences of his hefty borrowing on behalf of the Church would linger for years.⁵³ For Grant personally, the episode underscored his reoccurring commitment to obedience and success, his capacity to make social connections and negotiate, and an inner desire to put the affairs of the Church before his own. These tendencies would

50. Joseph F. Smith to Heber J. Grant, July 12, 1893, 584 [image 143], typescript, Grant Collection, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/ef78cc02-958b-44a6-b0aa-d53eb7157abe/0/0>.

51. Horace G. Whitney to Heber J. Grant, July 22, 1893, 587 [image 149], typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/ef78cc02-958b-44a6-b0aa-d53eb7157abe/0/0>; Walker, *Qualities That Count*, 117.

52. Grant, Journal, October 3, 1893, images 217–9, typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/ef78cc02-958b-44a6-b0aa-d53eb7157abe/0/0>.

53. Walker, *Qualities That Count*, 135–6.

aid and afflict Grant the remainder of his life. Grant constantly sought to balance his own personal ambitions for longstanding financial security with his desire to seek the kingdom of God first.

Even though Grant felt firsthand the crushing weight of debt as he negotiated for the Church, he continued to chase personal financial relief and stability. The aftermath of 1893 continued to take a toll on his personal net worth. He wrote optimistically in 1895:

I do hope and pray that I shall be able to so live that the Lord will see fit to make an instrument in His hands of me to get wealth to build up His Kingdom with. I told the Lord in my prayers this evening all that I hoped to be able to do and how much I desired to be able to live so that I would be able to meet the Prophet Joseph Smith and my father, whom I have never seen, and who I am informed killed himself working for the cause of truth. . . . I do feel the testimony of the spirit that I shall be greatly blessed of the Lord in the near future in financial matters, and I am indeed thankful for this testimony. I cannot think of anything that would give me so much cause for gratitude as to have the Lord bless me so that I could get out of debt and to have Him magnify me so that I would be an instrument in His hands in assisting the Church to do the same.⁵⁴

Six years later, Grant's finances were in no better shape as he began to anticipate a mission call. At a meeting of the Quorum of the Twelve in February 1901, President George Q. Cannon announced the First Presidency's intention to open a mission in Japan. "The moment he made this remark [*sic*]," Grant wrote in his journal, "I felt that I would be called to open up this mission."⁵⁵ Cannon then announced that the First Presidency had settled on Grant for this call with the understanding that he was "free from his financial embarrassments." On the spot, Grant felt to interject to correct the record about his indebtedness before "a spirit came over me to the effect that if I would only get up and state to the brethren I was considerably more than \$100,000 in debt . . . that I was about this . . . worse off than nothing, that the brethren undoubtedly would release me from this mission. But I rejected these impressions." When President Snow asked him if he could accept the call, Grant simply promised to arrange his finances to do so.⁵⁶ After a sleepless night, he set

54. Grant, Journal, February 15, 1895, 226 [image 51], typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/b6136cd4-291d-45bb-8cdd-8312a6aa0e85/0/0>.

55. Grant, Journal, February 14, 1901, image 15, typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/3d66bebfb-a53c-4eac-aeaf-4036b3316d5e/0/0>.

56. Grant, Journal, **February 14, 1901, images 15, 17.**



FIGURE 6. *Left to right*, Horace Ensign, Heber J. Grant, Alma O. Taylor, and Louis A. Kelsch before departing for Japan, 1901. Courtesy Church History Library.

out to extract himself from his personal debts.⁵⁷ By the time he departed for his mission, his major debt obligations were resolved, and he felt that God had intervened on his behalf because of his willingness to serve the Lord (fig. 6).

The allure of prospective business opportunities that could alleviate his indebtedness continued to chase Grant late in his apostolic service and into his presidential years. In 1915, his son-in-law George J. Cannon warned him “to avoid further debt.” “Trembling with emotion,” he nearly “rebuked [Grant] for going on getting into debt for new things in order to make money” and wished him to “be freed from care and anxiety” so that Grant could actually sleep at night.⁵⁸

57. Grant, Journal, February 15, 1901, image 19.

58. Heber J. Grant to George J. Cannon, December 2, 1915, image 313, typescript, Grant Collection, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/57b3e28a-015d-453c-a957-653ff07bf804/0/0>.

Grant regularly noted his financial successes and challenges in his journal. In August 1917, he wrote, “To-day I bought five thousand shares of the Sunset Mining Company stock. I feel almost condemned to run in debt for mining stock in view of my financial distress, but I am quite strongly impressed that this property is a valuable one and that my investment there may be the means of assisting to meet some of my financial obligations.”⁵⁹ To those he knew well and trusted, Grant talked openly about his investments and the health challenges that resulted.

His frankness largely stemmed from his early morning habit of dictating letters, which caused him to be more forthright in his disclosures. He remarked to his cousin around this time: “My own health is good, but I am troubled some on account of failing to get as much sleep as I feel I should have. I can’t get along on 4 or 5 hours, all that many men feel is enough. I am still suffering in the flesh on account of my debts of more than \$100,000. I shall be grateful if I ever get out.”⁶⁰ While Grant acquired acumen at business from years of working in the banking and insurance industries and from sitting on the boards of Church enterprises, he often was his own worst enemy when it came to personal investments, ever optimistic he had backed the right enterprise or institution. His private intentions were never to accumulate the lifestyle of the upper class, but to reach a level of financial security where money no longer occupied his mind.

By January 1926, Grant reported to his daughter Rachel that he had finally put his remaining debts behind him. “My heart is full and running over with thanks to our Father in Heaven,” he wrote, “that I am free from the bondage of debt.”⁶¹ As the United States entered the Great Depression of the 1930s, Grant decried speculative financing and the accumulation of personal debt. He was not afraid to use his own experience to urge Latter-day Saints to avoid debt at all costs. He declared to the Relief Society in 1932:

If the people known as Latter-day Saints had listened to the advice given from this stand by my predecessor, under the inspiration of the Lord, calling and urging upon the Latter-day Saints not to run in debt, this

59. Heber J. Grant, Journal, 1917 January–December, August 22, 1917, image 275, Grant Collection, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/ba092ea7-3ffc-446c-ac94-e1931ca1ffd4/0/0>.

60. Heber J. Grant to Miss Mamie Shreve, February 10, 1918, image 57, typescript, Grant Collection, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/f2885994-fb3a-4202-8840-825e0bff2f14/0/0>.

61. Grant, Journal, January 1, 1926, 1 [image 61], typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/a80372f2-8d56-4b64-aade-1164bc720811/0/0>.

great depression would have hurt the Latter-day Saints very, very little. . . . To my mind, the main reason of the depression in the United States as a whole, is the bondage of debt and the spirit of speculation among the people. . . . We have mortgaged our future without taking into account the incidents that may happen—sickness, operations, etc. . . . There is a peace and a contentment which comes into the heart when we live within our means, there is no question about it. I know all about it, because years ago I did not pay any attention to the talk about running into debt. I ran into debt everlastingly. . . . If there is any many living who is entitled to say, “Keep out of debt,” his name is Heber J. Grant.⁶²

Born out of his own personal experience, Grant imagined a Latter-day Saint membership equipped to meet the needs of the most down-trodden and needy among them because they ascribed to sound financial principles. Few needed to repeat Grant’s own path if they avoided debt and saved. Eventually, Grant enshrined his perspective in a new Church-wide welfare program (first called the Church Security Program) to address the oppressive economic conditions of the Great Depression. When he reported on the first results of the program at the October 1936 general conference, he reminded the Saints that the primary purpose of the program was “to set up, in so far as it might be possible, a system under which the curse of idleness would be done away with, the evils of a dole abolished, and independence, industry, thrift, and self respect be once more established amongst our people. . . . Work is to be re-enthroned as the ruling principles of the lives of our Church membership.”⁶³ Tutored by his own life experience, Grant was then equipped to navigate the Church through the greatest financial crisis of a generation. His journals document these hard-earned lessons and reveal some of the costs on him personally.

As Grant worked to balance business and ecclesiastical demands over the course of his apostolic service, those closest to him worried his health would not be able to withstand the inherent stress. Since his young adulthood, Grant had exhibited anxiety and sleeplessness that could be exacerbated by a pressing schedule and obstacles endemic to life. As he aged, his prolonged periods of insomnia made him prolific in his

62. “President Heber J. Grant,” *Relief Society Magazine* 19, no. 5 (May 1932): 299, 301, 302. <https://archive.org/details/reliefsocietymag19reli/page/294/mode/2up>.

63. Heber J. Grant, “The Message of the First Presidency to the Church,” in *One Hundred Seventh Semi-Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1936), 3, <https://archive.org/details/conferencereport1936sa/page/2/mode/2up>.

correspondence, but he expressed frequent concerns in his journal about his ability to withstand the demands of his daily schedule on little sleep.⁶⁴ He developed strategies to cope over time, but none were foolproof.

As was the tradition of many General Authorities, Grant found respite by heading to southern California for its temperate climate. While visiting California in 1917, Grant was introduced to the game of golf, which eventually became an outlet for him when he felt overwhelmed. In Santa Monica, Grant visited President Joseph F. Smith and Presiding Bishop Charles W. Nibley while they were on the golf course. He recorded in his journal, “They were playing what is known as a nine-hole game. They had just finished eight holes and I was requested to join them in the game and make the last hole, which I did in eight hits. This is the first time I have ever hit a golf ball. The game does not appeal to me, but I believe that the pleasure of visiting with friends would make it an interesting game, and I am sure that walking around, from hole to hole, and hitting the little ball would be excellent exercise.”⁶⁵

Over the next few years Grant evolved from skeptical participant to devotee of the game. When he traveled to Santa Monica, California for rest, he often played every day.⁶⁶ When he was in Salt Lake City and in good health, he tried to “go to the golf links three or four mornings each week and play nine holes, prior to going to [his] office.” Golf he felt was “very materially strengthening . . . physically” and “the most restful game” he had ever encountered because it caused him to “forget all his troubles.”⁶⁷ Golf added routine to Grant’s schedule, forcing him outside into the fresh air to exercise regularly. During his tenure as prophet and president of the Church, his financial burdens were largely relegated to the past, but he continued to use golf as a means of maintaining his physical and mental health.

64. Walker, *Qualities That Count*, 95; Grant to Shreve, February 10, 1918, image 57.

65. Grant, Journal, 1917 January–December, August 2, 1917, image 257, typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/ba092ea7-3ffc-446c-ac94-e1931ca1fd4/0/0>.

66. See Grant, Journal, January 24, 1918, image 27, typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/f2885994-fb3a-4202-8840-825e0bff2f14/0/0>; Grant, Journal, March 7, 1922, 54–5 [images 125, 127], typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/a234d79a-afaa-4f3a-9783-e1c7cc7e860c/0/0>; Heber J. Grant to “My Dearly Beloved Daughters,” March 7, 1922, Grant Collection.

67. Heber J. Grant to J. F. Grant, May 5, 1934 [image 57], Grant Collection, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/cd0d900d-705f-40e6-a708-741f47301da2/0/56>; see Grant, Journal, May 5, 1934, 57–8 [images 107–8], typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/9a8c2c1e-99a8-4c43-a0c4-8e70aa317864/0/0>.

The Legacy of the Heber J. Grant Journals

To outsiders and admiring Latter-day Saints alike, Heber J. Grant appeared to epitomize American success. He took the reins of a Church institution in 1918 that was in far better financial shape than when he joined the Quorum of the Twelve in 1882. He presided over a rapid period of institutional growth, founded the Church Security Program, and guided the Church through the Great Depression as its prophet and president (fig. 7). His business acumen appeared to suit him in a position that placed him at the intersection of Church enterprise and ecumenical outreach. As one member of the Quorum of the Twelve assessed of Grant, “His energies were abundant, his ambitions high, his business insight keen. It was America in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Men were making fortunes by seizing opportunities. Before him lay the alluring world of business. He knew he had business genius. He yearned to make himself a master in that realm, and move among the great ones. . . . Business had become with him a real passion.”⁶⁸ *Time* magazine had printed a similar appraisal of Grant; such acumen was part and parcel with the highest values an American could possess. Executive leadership and discipleship at this level, however, carried hidden costs few could externally appraise.

Grant wrote his journal reluctantly but persistently as an exercise in personal recordkeeping. His efforts left archivists, historians, and general readers an artifact of his character. Taken cumulatively, his journals attest to his personal wrestle with faithful discipleship amid the beating challenges of life. Grant was unflinchingly obedient to prophetic and scriptural command, loyal to his friends and family, engrossed in his labors and responsibilities, and fiercely determined to further the work of the Church (fig. 8). Behind his public labors and accomplishments was a man both made by and often afflicted by the circumstances of his life.

Examining a comprehensive private journal offers readers a chance to assess a life from beginning to end. The arc of Grant’s life could have sent him many directions. The circumstances of his childhood might have been too much for others. But with the love and guidance of his mother, his circumstances transformed into a critical component of his identity. He routinely took stock of his religious commitment through the lens of his father’s public legacy. Those that simply identify Grant as a fearless business and Church leader miss a more private legacy, one that saw Grant meet his ecclesiastical and personal responsibilities head on in the

68. Richard R. Lyman, “The Widow and Her Son,” *Improvement Era*, November 1936, 712.



FIGURE 7. Heber J. Grant, Charles W. Penrose, and Anthon H. Lund in the Church Administration Building, circa 1920. Courtesy Church History Library.



FIGURE 8. Heber J. Grant and Emily Wells Grant with daughters Martha, Grace, Emily, and Frances during Grant's service as European Mission president, 1905. Courtesy Church History Library.

face of intermittent mental and physical health challenges. Through his presidential years, he remained a friend to the orphan and impoverished. He sent money to inquirers who needed assistance, particularly during the Great Depression. His journal notes these private moments of generosity with little fanfare.⁶⁹ He remained fixed on the personal experiences that rendered him sympathetic and compassionate to those less fortunate.

Researchers can now plumb the depths of Grant's corpus of journals for significant episodes in his own life and in the development of the Church. Grant documented meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve,⁷⁰ his mission to Japan in 1901,⁷¹ and his European Mission presidency from 1903 to 1906 among a host of other episodes worthy of study.⁷² But the daily rhythm of his life found between these events reveals the essence of a Latter-day Saint prophet—his values, vulnerabilities, aspirations, and quiet discipleship, the trends of which only become discernible after a careful reading of a lifetime of journal keeping. Those that knew him best, like Apostle John A. Widtsoe, assessed his overall character accordingly, “He is a man possessed of a determined will for righteousness, progressive, fearless in the cause of truth, generous in thought and action, loving in friendship, true, wise and forgiving. Throughout his nature runs the love and beauty, truth, and intelligence, culminating in a mighty spiritual character. He is a friend of God, and his divine Father has been his friend.”⁷³

69. See Grant, Journal, September 26, 1933, 173–4 [images 200–1], typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/5b66d2c9-ebd2-4c0f-8246-23ae5171e7c7/0/0>; Grant, Journal, 1938, July 2, 1938, 149 [image 223], typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/d3994f35-98bc-4a04-a21c-2bae633a8097/0/0>; Grant, Journal, September 23, 1938, 216 [image 302], typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/d3994f35-98bc-4a04-a21c-2bae633a8097/0/0>.

70. See Heber J. Grant, Letterpress journal, April 3, 1892, vol. 4, images 142, 145, typescript, Grant Collection, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/c84ed1b8-c01d-405f-9b4e-47e08b31159e/0/0>; Grant, Letterpress journal, January 12, 1893, 4:384–9 [images 793–804], holograph, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/c84ed1b8-c01d-405f-9b4e-47e08b31159e/0/0>; Grant, Letterpress journal, April 2, 1895, 5:246–7 [image 537–40], typescript, Grant Collection, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/37d6416f-c185-4433-b44b-7557f4262289/0/0>.

71. See Grant, Journal, August 19–September 5, 1901, 12–23 [images 23–45], typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/0666c872-5875-4cec-a31f-f1d4bdaafa04/0/0>.

72. See Grant, Journal, November 12, 1903, image 259, typescript, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/dc59c117-c9ec-46b1-9305-967cb62e3b76/0/258>.

73. John A. Widtsoe, “President Grant the Man: A Character Study,” *Improvement Era*, November 1936, 665.

Grant shared details about himself as much as he described his world in building the pages of his journals. And while many of his entries fail to rise above a daily listing of his activities and meetings, the steady march of the mundane within the pages of his journal cumulatively divulges a predictable wrestle with the common human experience. Readers can pass their judgment on how Grant held up to his own humanity, but they should do so using the sharper lens his entire corpus of journals provides. In his resiliency, determination, and adherence to truth, Grant triumphs. Future studies of his journals will perhaps find that such an outcome ought not be taken for granted.

Scott D. Marianno is an archivist at the Church History Library in Salt Lake City.

Awakening

You tumble asleep past shuddering lights
insistent like operatic vocal cords
through subway windows. Orange plastic seats.
Gray littered floor. The smell of old pizza.
In your dream the train is empty, loneliness
yawns before you as if you are Jonah
and the world is a whale. Some whole heaviness
heaves the darkness against you. In the dream
you know that this earth is larger than you can bear
alone. But then you wake up and the train is full.
Full of people. People. You remember.
Playgrounds exist. And dance halls. And stadiums.
The Great Wall of China and the Eiffel Tower.
Bountiful Park. The Whole Earth. Your Kitchen.
From some ancient aloneness, you wake up
remembering there are hugs. There are
Quinceaneras, Sweet Sixteens, sweat-filled air
at your cousin's wedding. And even love
in what it feels like to hate. Wanting to destroy
instead of choose who you've bound yourself to.
Here in the tumbling swiftness
of the tunnel of loneliness and languish.
there are humans. There are these people.
Strangers and friends on your bench. Hold to them
with chatter and anguish. Hold them however you can.

—Kate Romney Johnson

This poem was a finalist in the 2025 BYU Studies Poetry Contest.

The Newly Found Letter from John W. Welch to Robert K. Thomas Two Days after the Discovery of Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon

John W. Welch

The discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, made early in the morning on Wednesday, August 16, 1967, continues to draw attention even fifty-eight years later. Many people, old and young, find this event interesting and still highly relevant to contemporary studies of the Book of Mormon. They especially ask me what it felt like when I spotted the first one in Mosiah 5:10–12. People often wonder how that discovery happened. What led up to it? How did it feel? With whom did I first share it? How did they react? And what happened next?

Eager to know, people usually react with amazement as I tell them how exciting and meaningful it was for me—a twenty-year-old missionary in an isolated ancient Roman outpost on the Danube River in southeastern Germany—to have made such a discovery. When I recount the main details of that event, several adjectives often come up in their responses: amazing, remarkable, significant, inspired, important, interesting, useful,



FIGURE 1. The medieval cathedral of Regensburg, on the Danube River, in lower Bavaria. On a bulletin board a few yards to the west of this gothic masterpiece was an announcement of a lecture series, on Friday mornings, about the New Testament that I happened to notice and then to attend. Photo by John W. Welch.

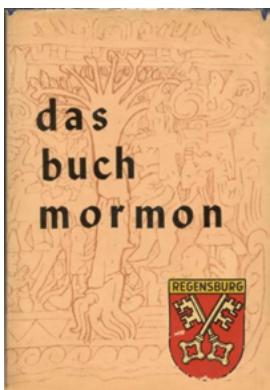


FIGURE 2. This is the copy of the Book of Mormon in which chiasmus in the Book of Mormon was discovered. The graphic on this cover is the tree of life on Stela 5 from Izapa, Mexico; its ancient significance is explained on the inside front flap. On the back cover is a picture of a Persian gold metal plate in a stone box, from about 515 BC. Twelve questions, with scripture references to their answers, are on the inside back flap. I had put the Regensburg decal on this copy, which I used for personal study. Courtesy John W. Welch.

werden//ausgelöscht werde, . . . and then *wirt zur linken Hand Gottes finden//zur linken Hand Gottes befunden werdet*, and so on. I then went back and rescanned all of King Benjamin's speech in Mosiah 2–5, discovering and marking up—what I believe to be—three of the best examples of structural chiasmus found anywhere in world literature.

1. For two such accounts, see also Greg Welch, "The Amazing True Story of How Chiasmus Was Discovered in the Book of Mormon," posted July 20, 2016, by Scripture Central, YouTube, 10 min., 15 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GpJ-ILrJcc>; and "The Discovery of Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," posted on August 17, 2017 by Book of Mormon Central, YouTube, 8 min., 33 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InUSGarArl0>.

and even miraculous. People rightly wonder: Why had no one ever noticed this before? Was the timing somehow just right? How did all the necessary pieces come together to make this discovery possible?

Since that day, August 16, 1967, I have been asked numerous times to tell this story, which I am always glad to do.¹ Fortunately, I still have my missionary day-by-day appointment book, my original study notes, and the 1965 booklet about chiasmus in the Gospel of Matthew by a Jesuit priest named Paul Gaechter, which I had purchased a month earlier at the nearby Catholic bookstore. For a few days, I had been dipping into that book and simultaneously marking up a small Catholic German edition of the New Testament to verify and understand what Father Gaechter claimed about the presence of chiasmus in the Gospel of Matthew. Early that morning—it was still dark outside—I was awakened by the words, "If it is evidence of Hebrew style in Matthew, it must be evidence of Hebrew style in the Book of Mormon." I got out of bed and sat down at the table where my companion and I had been reading in Mosiah 4 before going to bed. I turned the very next page, and the key words in the chiastic center point of Mosiah 5 in verses 10–12 jumped out at me: first *Über-tretung//Über-tretung*, . . . and next *ausgelöscht werden//ausgelöscht werde*, . . . and then *wirt zur linken Hand Gottes finden//zur linken Hand Gottes befunden werdet*, and so on. I then went back and rescanned all of King Benjamin's speech in Mosiah 2–5, discovering and marking up—what I believe to be—three of the best examples of structural chiasmus found anywhere in world literature.

17,27 und 19,1 - 20,16) mit der Rede zwischendrin. „Erzählung“ ist hier im weitesten Sinn zu verstehen. Diese Reihen umfassen nicht nur Wundertaten und andere Handlungen Jesu, sondern auch Streitgespräche, Wehrufe und Anklagen; zu diesen letzteren gehört auch Mt 23. All das ergibt fünf große Teile im Inneren des Matthäus-Evangeliums, deren jeder aus einer Rede und einer Erzählungsreihe besteht.

Ihnen geht ein Teil voraus (über die Anfänge Jesu, Mt 1-4), der keine Rede enthält, ebenso folgt auf sie als Schluß des Evangeliums eine Partie ohne Rede (Leidens- und Auferstehungsberichte Mt 26-28). Damit ist die Einteilung oder der Aufbau des Matthäus-Evangeliums, wie er vom Verfasser kommt, dargelegt. Es enthält sieben Teile, nicht mehr und nicht weniger.

Nun wäre ein siebenfältiges Nacheinander ohne innere Gruppierung reichlich langweilig. Matthäus muß das auch empfunden haben. So baute er diese Siebenheit in einem formalen Chiasmus auf, wie an den Reden sichtbar wird. Vom Chiasmus wird später noch die Rede sein. Wie dem ersten Teil der letzte entspricht, sofern in beiden eine Rede fehlt, so entspricht die erste Rede (im II. Teil) der fünften und letzten Rede (im VI. Teil), insofern beide mehr zum Volk als zu den Jüngern gesprochen sind. Hingegen sind die Unterweisungen der zweiten Rede (im III. Teil) und der vierten Rede (im V. Teil) an die Jünger Jesu gerichtet, nicht an das Volk. Die dritte Rede (Mt 13) ist als Parabelrede einzig in ihrer Art, wenn auch in anderen Reden ab und zu Parabeln vorkommen. Somit läßt sich der Aufbau des Matthäus-Evangeliums schematisch so darstellen:

- I. Teil — keine Rede
- II. Teil — Rede an das Volk
- III. Teil — Rede an die Jünger
- IV. Teil — Parabelrede
- V. Teil — Rede an die Jünger
- VI. Teil — Rede an das Volk
- VII. Teil — keine Rede

Dieser kunstvolle Aufbau ist ein bewußt angewandtes literarisches Stilmittel. Wir haben uns hier ausschließlich an das Äußere, Formale gehalten. Auch die äußere Form hat ein Recht, beachtet zu werden; das Ergebnis erbringt dafür die Rechtfertigung. Später

FIGURE 3. This chiastic centerpiece of the Gospel of Matthew, in Matt. 13:10-18, as presented on page 13 of Father Gaechter's recent book on the literary art in the Gospel of Matthew. Courtesy John W. Welch.

Many of the details about the further unfolding of that discovery are told in the attractively illustrated article entitled “The Discovery of Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon: Forty Years Later,” which was published in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies (JBMS)* in 2007, freely available on the web.² As we prepared that article for publication, I knew that I had written two letters shortly after the chiasmus discovery. I had in my possession one of those two letters, which I wrote the morning of Friday, August 18, and sent to my family. My mom kept that letter, and she gave it to me after I returned home in 1968.

Until recently, however, I was missing the other letter that I wrote to BYU English Professor Robert K. Thomas, telling him about this discovery. I wanted him to be the first to know. He was the director of the honors program during my first three semesters at BYU (fall 1964–winter 1966). He taught me English 115H and Book of Mormon 122H, and he encouraged me to study German and sign up for the semester abroad in Salzburg, Austria, before going on my mission. In addition, I was aware that Dr. Thomas regularly taught an upper-division English class titled “The Bible as Literature” and had published a Relief Society resource titled *Out of the Best Books*.³ So, for several reasons, I wanted to share my discovery of



FIGURE 4. Robert K. Thomas, PhD, Professor of English, Director of the BYU Honors Program, and Academic Vice-President under Ernest L. Wilkinson and Dallin H. Oaks in the 1960s and 1970s. From a photo taken about 1968 published by the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at BYU in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 2 (2007): 76.

2. John W. Welch, “The Discovery of Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon: Forty Years Later,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 2 (2007): 74–87, 99, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol16/iss2/10>. See also John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 10, no. 1 (1969): 69–84, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/chiasmus-in-the-book-of-mormon>; John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon: Or the Book of Mormon Does It Again,” *New Era*, February 1972, 6–11. See also the book celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, John W. Welch and Donald W. Parry, eds., *Chiasmus: The State of the Art* (BYU Studies Quarterly, 2020), <https://byustudies.byu.edu/issue/59-2-Supplement>.

3. Bruce B. Clark and Robert K. Thomas, *Out of the Best Books*, 5 vols. (Deseret Book, 1964–69).

chiasmus in the Book of Mormon with him immediately and ask if he knew of anyone else coming across something like this.

In 2007, while I was providing information for the writing of the *JBMS* article, I did not have the letter I had written to Professor Thomas. He would have been the last person to have had it, but he had died in October 1998. And thus, I did not know for sure the date on which I had written that letter to Professor Thomas. Because he had answered me on October 9, 1967—I still have his response—I knew that I had written to him in August or September, as the 2007 article mentions. But without having the actual copy of my letter to him, I could only approximate (on the safe side) that I had written to him at “about this time.”⁴

Then, after my wife Jeannie and I had returned home from our 2021–2023 mission, I received a call from one of my former law students, Stuart W. Hinckley. He had married Angie, a daughter of Robert K. Thomas, in the 1980s, and they lived in the Salt Lake City area where he practiced law. Angie had been contacted by the people at BYU who were processing all of the administrative papers of Robert Thomas and filing them in the BYU institutional archive. In completing that immense task, the filing team set aside a few items that did not look like they belonged in the BYU official records but thought the family might be interested in looking at. Angie and Stuart then made an appointment to come to Provo to see if any of those personal items might be worth keeping. When they saw the envelope pictured below, Stuart immediately recognized it as having been sent by me, one of his law professors. They opened it and recognized the significance of its contents.

Soon, Angie and Stuart called me, and—wanting to deliver it to me personally—we arranged a time when they could deliver it to me in downtown Salt Lake City, where Stuart kindly and generously handed it to me, still in its original envelope. I was astonished. I had not seen that letter nor even dreamed that it still existed ever since I sealed and mailed it more than half a century earlier. What a thrill—not only for me but for all who can now read it.

As you will see, it is fairly long and very detailed. As you read, it pays to compare the typescripts with their handwritten original pages. As I wrote to Professor Thomas—and wanting to come across as a serious academic—I quoted several lines of Gaechter’s German, without taking (or having) the time to translate them for him into English. Maybe I assumed that he knew enough German to get the gist of what was being

4. Welch, “Discovery of Chiasmus,” 83.

AUG 22 1967

Regensburg den 18. VIII. 1967

Dear Brother Thomas!

Viele Grüße aus Süddeutschland! We've had quite a summer, quite inspirational I mean. But I need to ask you a couple questions because we are a lonely folk cut off from the mainstream. I wouldn't ^{have} also liked to have been more formal, but we'll do our best.

I think I've found something new and very convincing in the Book of Mormon, but the entire project is of course still in infancy. I've shown it to professors, librarians, book store managers and have arrangements to speak with the theologians here and haven't yet been refuted. So it may be good. It all started with a little book I bought (which I do often, I must confess) by a Jesuit Prof in Innsbruck, Paul Gaechter, entitled "Die Literarische Kunst im Matthäus-Evangelium". It even reminded me of your "Bible as Lit." class. In his book he develops an idea of Hermann Cladde, (1919) [90 years after 1829] to the extent that he claims "Leider besitzen wir es ^(Matthäus) nur in griechischer Form, finden aber auch im griechischen Matthäus-Evangelium so viele Züge hebräischen Empfindens und Denkens, daß am Übersetzungskarakter dieses griechischen Werkes nicht gezwifelt werden kann" (page 5). The ideas were very impressive and exciting! I studied and thought it out constantly. Matthew must have been first rate Hebrew.

FIGURE 5. Page 1 of my letter to Robert K. Thomas, written and mailed two days after discovering chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. Courtesy John W. Welch.

said there or that he had faculty members close by who could do so. For present purposes, in transcribing my handwriting, I have inserted my translations of those German quotations or abbreviations in brackets and italics. Bracketed text in Roman typeface is in the original letter. Text between angle brackets is inserted text in the original letter.

Letter to Robert K. Thomas

Here, now, is the five-page letter I hurriedly wrote on April 18, just two days after the remarkable discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon.

[page 1] Regensburg den 18. VIII. 1967 [August 18, 1967]

Dear Brother Thomas!

Viele Grüsse aus Süddeutschland! [*Many greetings from South Germany!*] We've had quite a summer, quite inspirational I mean. But I need to ask you a couple questions because we are a lonely folk cut off from the mainstream. I would have also liked to have been more formal, but we'll do our best.

I think I've found something new and very convincing in the Book of Mormon, but the entire project is of course still in infancy. I've shown it to Professors, Librarians, bookstore managers and have arrangements to speak with the Theologians here and haven't yet been refuted. So it may be good. It all started with a little book I bought (which I do often, I must confess) by a Jesuit Prof in Innsbruck, Paul Gaechter, entitled "Die Literarische Kunst im Matthäus-Evangelium" [*The Literary Art in the Gospel of Matthew*]. It even reminded me of your "Bible as Lit[erature]" class. In his book he develops an idea of /a man, / Hermann Cladde (1919) [90 years after 1829], to the extent that he [Gaechter] claims "Leider besitzen wir es /(Matthäus)/ nur in griechischer Form, finden aber auch im griechischen Matthäus-Evangelium so viele Züge hebräischen Empfindens und Denkens, dass am Übersetzungscharakter dieses griechischen Werkes nicht gezwifelt werden kann" [“Unfortunately, the earliest version of the Gospel of Matthew that we have is in Greek; but even in the Greek version we find so many features of Hebrew expressions and thinking that one cannot doubt the Semitic origins of this as a work that was translated into Greek”] (page 5). The ideas were very impressive and exciting! I studied and thought it out constantly. Matthew must have been *[a]* first rate Hebrew.⁵

5. The back cover blurb on Gaechter's book notes that "In addition, Gaechter has published an extensive commentary on the first Gospel {his book *Das Matthäus Evangelium*} (1964). He often goes down his own paths in his research, but his explanations are definitely interesting and always stimulating." For two recent LDS publications agreeing that the Gospel of Matthew strongly reflects Jewish themes, see Tyler Griffin, "Matthew's Portrayal of Jesus: Son of David, a New Moses, a Son of God" in *Thou*

The discussion of the problem climaxes with the two forms "Symmetrie" and "Chiasmus" and the author comments "der Urheber für geschlossene Formen ist kein Griech, sondern ein Hebräer, da die Anordnung eines literarischen Stücks in derartigen Formen NUR vom Semitischen her verstanden werden kann" The closed form which he mentions is the symmetry, a-b-a construction or chiasmus a-b-c...d...c-b-a. These appear all through Matthew, z.B.:

Matt 16:13 - Matt 17:27

A. Peter 16,13-20

B. Christ prophesies his suffering 16,21

C. Peter reprimanded 16,22-23

Jesu Nachfolge 16,24-28 ("the cross" v.24)

- climax - D. Transfiguration of Christ 17,1-9

C. Wiederkommen des Elias 17,10-13 ("leiden" v1)

All disciples reprimanded 17,14-21

B. Christ prophesies his suffering 17,22-23

A. Peter 17,24-27

That's just a sample, but this pattern is in every part of Matthew. Of course other literary forms are also discussed. Are you familiar with this one?

What do you think of it? He thinks it's the proof for Matthew. z.B. again the whole gospel:

I.	NO speech	ch 1-4
II.	Speech to the people	5-7
III.	To the disciples	10
IV.	Parables	13
V.	To the disciples	18
VI.	Speech to the people	24-25
VII.	No speech	26-28

FIGURE 6. Page 2, presenting two strong chiasms in the Gospel of Matthew. Courtesy John W. Welch.

[page] 2

The discussion of the problem climaxes with the two forms “symmetrie” and “chiasmus” and the author comments “der Urheber für geschlossene Formen ist kein Griech, sondern ein Hebräer, da die Anordnung eines literarischen Stücks in derartigen Formen NUR vom Semitischen her verstanden werden kann.” [*the originator of closed forms was not a Greek, but rather a Hebrew, because the arrangement of a literary composition in this form can only have arisen from a Semite.*] The closed form which he mentions is the symmetry, a-b-a construction or chiasmus a-b-c . . . d . . . c-b-a. These appear all through Matthew, z[um] B[eispiel]⁶:

Matt 16:13–Matt 17:27

- A. Peter 16:13–20
- B. Christ prophesies his suffering 16:21
- C. Peter reprimanded 16:22–23
Jesu Nachfolge [*followers of Jesus*] 16:24–28
("the cross" v. 24)
- climax— D. Transfiguration of Christ 17:1–9
- C. Wiederkommen des Elias [*return of Elijah*] 17:10–13
("leiden" [*to suffer*] v. 12)
All disciples reprimanded 17:14–21
- B. Christ prophesies his suffering 17:22–23
- A. Peter 17:24–27

That's just a sample,⁷ but this pattern is in every part of Matthew. Of course other literary forms are also discussed. Are you familiar with this one? What do you think of it? He thinks it's the proof for Matthew. z.B. again the whole gospel [*of Matthew, as displayed and on Gaechter's p. 13*]:

- I. No Speech ch 1–4
- II. Speech to the people 5–7
- III. To the disciples 10
- IV. Parables 13
- V. To the disciples 18
- VI. Speech to the people 24–25
- VII. No speech 26–28

Art the Christ, the Son of the Living God, ed. Eric D. Huntsman, Lincoln H. Blumell, and Tyler J. Griffin (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Deseret Book, 2018), 67–91; and Jordan Lavender, “**Jesus and the Torah in Matthew**,” *BYU Studies* 63, no. 2 (2024): 99–124.

6. *Zum Beispiel*, abbreviated as “z.B.” means “for example.”

7. Found in Gaechter, 30.

-3-

Every time Gaechter said "Hurray for Matthew! The details prove it!" I cringed a bit and thought, 'Hey, not too loud there, The Book of Mormon ought to be doing the same'. Well you can guess the result, I went searching for symmetry and chiasmus in the Book of Mormon and found a mint in Nibley's favorite chapters Mosiah 2-5. Not one chiasmus but 5 (perhaps 7)! which are all together a symmetrical system. no accident but a ceremonial ritual steeped in semitic style. If it's good for Matthew, how about Benjamin?

If you think there's something to it, I want to send you Gaechter's book and my notes on Mosiah 2-5. Here's a sample chiasmus Mosiah 2:9-27

A. Purpose of the assembly v.9

B. What is man? v.10-11

1. "I am no more than mortal (than you)"

2. "My entire strength comes from God"

C. The Laws (civil order) of Benjamin's kingdom 12-13

D. Service v.14-18

1. In the service of fellow man and God
2. "Labor to serve one another" v.18

climax E. Don't thank me, thank your heavenly king

2. "Live in peace one with another"

D. Service v.21

unprofitable servant

C. The Laws of God's Kingdom v.22

B. What is man? v.23-26

2. "All belongs to the creator"

1. "I am no more than dust (than you)" v.26

A. Purpose of assembly v.27

FIGURE 7. Page 3, showing the chiastic structure in Mosiah 2:9-27, the first of seven sections in Benjamin's ceremonial, coronation and covenantal speech. Courtesy John W. Welch.

[page] 3

Every time Gaechter said “Hurray for Matthew! The details prove it!” I cringed a bit and thought, “Hey, not too loud there, the Book of Mormon ought to be doing the same.” Well you can guess the result, I went searching for symmetry and chiasmus in the Book of Mormon and found a mint in Nibley’s favorite chapters Mosiah 2–5. Not one chiasmus but 5 (perhaps 7)! which are all together a symmetrical system. no accident but a ceremonial ritual steeped in semitic [*Semitic*] style. If it’s good for Matthew, how about *[for] Benjamin*?

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- A. Purpose of the assembly v. 9
- B. What is man? v 10–11
 - 1. “I am no more than mortal (than you)”
 - 2. “My entire strength comes from God
- C. The Laws (civil order) of Benjamin’s kingdom 12–13
- D. Service v. 14–19
 - In the service of fellow man and God
 - “Labor to serve one another” v. 18
- climax E. Don’t thank me, Thank your heavenly king
 - “Live in peace one with another”
- D. Service v. 21
 - Unprofitable servant
- C. The Laws of God’s kingdom v. 22
- B. What is man? v. 23–26
 - 2. “All belongs to the Creator”
 - 1. “I am no more than dust (than you)” v. 26
- A. Purpose of the assembly v. 27

It works again and again. It's easy to tell when you've got one because everything fits; if you're on a wrong track, nothing fits.

Perhaps the entire scheme could be arranged folgendurmapen: I. Give your thanks unto God for his service unto you (he created you) 2,9-2,27

II. Open rebellion against God brings no joy nor salvation. (children mentioned) 2,31-41

III. Angel's Proclamation of Christ
(short speech) 3,2-10

IV. State of Man (children) 3,11-27

V. Benjamin's testimony of Christ
(short symmetri) 4,4-10

VI. Harmony with God and fellow man brings peace, love, and joy (children mentioned) 4,11-30

VII. Take part in Christ's service - The Name
(he sealed and begot you) 5,7-15
(Ye are all children)

Climaxes are glarring in several chiasmus:

Ch. 2, 36b-37 "no place"
 > Open rebellion
 "no place"

Ch. 5, 11 Remember This name
 "blotted out"
 "transgression"
 "transgress"
 "blotted out"
 Remember This name

FIGURE 8. Page 4, outlining the seven parts of Benjamin's speech, with their respective centrepieces. Courtesy John W. Welch.

[page] 4

It works again and again. It's easy to tell when you've got one because everything fits, if you're on a wrong track, nothing fits.

Perhaps the entire scheme [*of Benjamin's overall speech*] could be arranged folgendermassen [*in the following way*]:

- I. Give your thanks unto God for his service unto you
(he created you) 2:9–2:27
- II. Open rebellion against God brings no joy nor salvation
(children mentioned) 2:31–41
- III. Angel's Proclamation [*sic*] of Christ
(short speech) 3:2–10
- IV. State of Man
(children) 3:11–27
- V. Benjamin's testimony of Christ
(short symmetry) 4:4–10
- VI. Harmony with God and fellow man brings peace, love, and joy
(children mentioned) 4:11–30
- VII. Take part in Christ's service—The Name
(he sealed and begot you) 5:7–15
(Ye are all children)

Climaxes are glarring [*sic*] in several chiasmus:

Ch. 2:36b–37 “no place”

Open rebellion

“no place” [*the center of Benjamin's part II*]

Ch. 5:11 Remember this name
 “blotted out”
 “transgression”
 “transgress”
 “blotted out”
Remember this name⁸

8. These lines stand at the very center of part VII in Benjamin's Speech.

-5- The use of children is also consistent - an interesting thread. Also interesting is the way the two parallel parts compliment each other, for example

Earthly laws (2, 12-13) → God's laws (2, 22)
or Wo! Wo! (4, 18) → Wo! Wo! (4, 23)

found on the left hand of God (5, 10) → left hand of God (5, 12b)
(a very strange expression)

Other give-aways are the parallel beginnings in the 4th chapter. v. 5-6 = v. 11

compare v. 7 = v. 12

faith and works.

or D. "And moreover" (3, 17) . . .

E. "like little children" v. 18b
climax Natural man is an enemy 19a

like a child (specific traits) 19b

D. "And moreover" (3, 20) . . .

and so on and so forth. Has the topic already been elaborately described? I had never heard of it.

Two problems follow:

1) Mos. 1, 4 indicates Egyptian influence. Could we show that Prof. Gaechter's idea is not Hebrew but Egyptian? 2) Was this literary form common in Lehi's day and before?

The Book of Mormon will do great things. Isaiah knew it, I know it. My testimony has made it a pleasure to be serving a mission! Please respond.

P.S. Just as with Matthew, we have no original Hebrew Book of Mormon manuscript. The parallels are amazing.

FIGURE 9. Page 5, pointing out escalations and significant dublets in Benjamin's compositional style. Courtesy John W. Welch.

[page] 5

The use of children is also consistent—an interesting thread. Also interesting is the way the two parallel parts compliment [sic] each other, for example

Earthly laws (2:12–13) → God's laws (2:22)⁹

or Wo! Wo! (4:18) → [echoed by] Wo! Wo! (4:23)

found on the left hand of God (5:10) → left hand of God (5:12b)

(a very strange expression)

Other give-aways [*sic*] are the parallel beginnings in the 4th chapter [*of Mosiah*]:

v. 5-6 = v. 11

compare v. 7 = v. 12

faith and works

or D. "And moreover" (3:17) . . .

E. like little children" v. 18b

Climax Natural man is an enemy 19a

like a child (specific traits) 19b

D. "And moreover (3:20) . . .

An[d] so on and so forth. Has the topic [of chiasmus] already been elaborately described? I had never heard of it.

Two problems follow:

1) Mos. 1:4 indicates egyptian [sic] influence. Could we shootd̄w that Prof. Gaechter's idea is not Hebrew but Egyptian? 2) Was this literary form common in Lehi's day and before?

The Book of Mormon will do great things. Isaiah knew it, I know it. My testimony has made it a pleasure to be serving a mission! please respond.

Sincerely,

John W. Welch

P.S. Just as with Matthew, we have no original Hebrew Book of Mormon manuscript. The parallels are amazing.

9. Benjamin not only repeats the word *law* but elevates earthly laws to heavenly laws in their counterpart.



Obviously, I was excited about the things I had discovered on Wednesday morning in Mosiah 5, in Mosiah 2 and 3, and also in King Benjamin's speech overall. Later that day, I located more chiastic structures back in 1 Nephi. On Thursday, my companion and I showed those results to several people, including a couple erudite priests in Regensburg. I was learning a lot, and my mind was racing with further questions and possible implications.

I promptly mailed this letter, dated August 18, 1967, in Regensburg, as the postage cancelation on the envelope indicates. As we usually did, I probably dropped this letter in the mailbox in front of Regensburg's main post office. On that morning, my companion and I would have ridden our bicycles past that post office on our way to the Regensburg railroad station to meet two missionaries in our district, coming from Landshut for a "split" with us, arriving at 9:09 a.m.¹⁰ I would go to Landshut with Elder Wimmer, while my companion, Elder Barry Barrus, would stay in Regensburg with Wimmer's junior companion for three days. In Landshut I would speak with a Catholic graduate student who was studying at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. He was actually quite intrigued by the idea of chiasmus in the New Testament and was friendly toward my enthusiasm for the idea of it being found in the Book of Mormon.

In addition, the date stamp on the top of the first page (see fig. 5) of this five-page letter shows that it was officially received by Robert Thomas's office at BYU already on Tuesday, August 22.

On the back side of this envelope, I wrote my return address (Gesandtenstrasse 10), which happened to be right next door to the main Catholic bookstore in Regensburg, the Pustet Buchhandlung. It was there, a couple weeks earlier, that I had bought the only copy on their shelves of Paul Gaechter's 1965 monograph entitled *Die literarische Kunst im Matthäus-Evangelium* (*The Literary Art in the Gospel of Matthew*), published as number seven in the Stuttgarter Bibelstudien, a series published by the Catholic Bible-Works Press in Stuttgart, Germany. Gaechter was a Jesuit scholar, born in Switzerland, who became the chancellor or academic vice-president of the University of Innsbruck, Austria.

On the back of the envelope, I had remarked, using my red scripture-marking pen: "... it's as exciting as skiing! and you can't break your leg at

10. My journal indicates that as the district leader, I then returned one of those two elders back to Landshut on Monday, August 21, where I spoke that evening, concluding our companion swap that weekend.

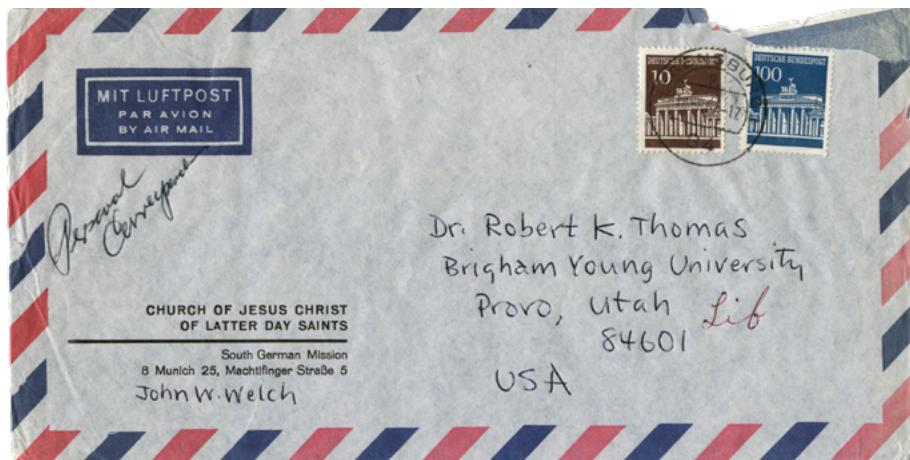


FIGURE 10. This letter was mailed on Friday morning, August 18, 1967, as the post mark shows. On the front side of this envelope the words “Personal Correspondence” were apparently added by President Thomas’s secretary. Without that notation, this letter would likely never have been given back to me. Courtesy John W. Welch.

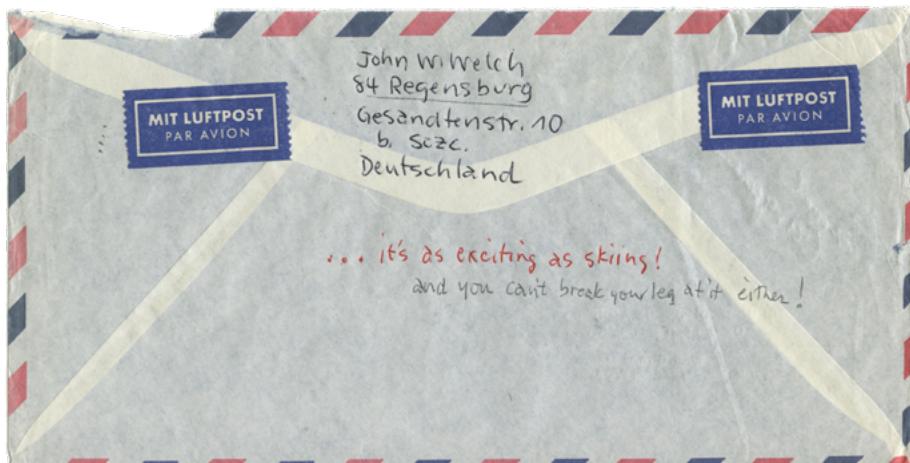


FIGURE 11. Reverse side of envelope. I couldn’t suppress my excitement and hoped to grab President Thomas’s attention. Courtesy John W. Welch.

it either!” as a friendly inside joke with Professor Thomas. While being a student in his Honors Book of Mormon class in the 1965 winter semester, I broke my left leg in a BYU skiing class and thus was on crutches almost all that semester. Still, I never missed any of Professor Thomas’s enriching lectures on the Book of Mormon, even though that class met on the top floor of the David O. McKay Building.

Letter Home to My Family

On that same Friday, August 18, 1967, I also wrote to my family, as our mission president strongly encouraged us to do each “D-Day” (diversion day, now known as preparation day), which was every Friday. I include this second letter here, because chiasmus also came up there. I wrote this letter on the same kind of blue airmail stationery and mailed it to my grandmother Eulalia Welch in Logan, Utah, because my parents and younger siblings would be there on Tuesday, having driven up from southern California that weekend.

In this second letter from August 18, 1967, after some chitchat, I mention that I was then on a train from Regensburg to Landshut, where I was scheduled to speak in sacrament meeting on Sunday and would also give a fireside on Monday evening. (I’m guessing that I mentioned chiasmus in those two talks.) I also noted here that “my mission is *well past ½ gone*.” Counting my two months in the LTM (Language Training Mission), that was true, but in fact, August 16—the precise day on which I first found chiasmus in the Book of Mormon in King Benjamin’s speech—was the exact midpoint of my twenty-four months in Germany. In my appointment book, I had marked that day as the one-year anniversary in my two years in the South German Mission. So, the discovery of chiasmus—fittingly—fell on the midpoint of my mission.

But most of all, I was excited to tell my grandmother (who unfortunately and unexpectedly died five months later on January 15, 1968, before I returned home) about my discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. She was a gifted poet and a reader, having served together with her husband, my grandfather, as teaching missionaries and administrators over the Māori Agricultural College in New Zealand in the early 1920s, so I hoped she would find this discovery interesting. I also wanted my mother and father to hear about it right away. And indeed, my father quickly wrote me back. He appropriately cautioned me about trying to prove the Book of Mormon to people. I responded to him on September 11, saying, “I know what you mean about proving it to other people, but I feel that the Lord has made it clear enough that man can choose and judge for himself.”¹¹

On the bottom of the first page of that letter to my grandmother, I wrote about the “discovery I made on Wed[nesday] morning.” I mentioned that “we’ve shown it [on Thursday] to professors and theologians and no one can refute it!”

11. Quoted in Welch, “The Discovery of Chiasmus,” 83.

On the second page, I then gave an example from Paul Gaechter's book, showing chiasmus in Matthew 16:13–17:27.¹²

I wrote that I had already found five, and maybe seven, chiasms in the Book of Mormon, but "not without a big push from the Lord," referring to my having been awakened very early Wednesday morning, being prompted to get out of bed and look for chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. In this letter, I also mentioned chiasmus in Mosiah 2:9–27 and 5:11. I then commented, "I've got pages of details and comparisons work[ed] out."

I added a note to my father, asking him if he knew of anything (or could find anything) written on the subject. Knowing that it was found in Matthew, I wondered if it was also found earlier in the Old Testament, perhaps in Isaiah or Jeremiah, which would be around Lehi's time. I even asked him about whether chiasmus in the Book of Mormon might have been influenced by Egyptian style "as Mosiah 1:4 suggests." In my letter earlier that Friday morning I had asked Professor Thomas something similar, as by then I was already looking back to Lehi, Nephi, and the plates of brass as the possible source of King Benjamin's use of chiasmus.

The following is a verbatim transcript of this second letter, which was written that morning while on the train to Landshut. Those three handwritten pages are reproduced here, because they contain further unique information, even though they contain no German or other points of documentary manuscript significance.¹³ I wrote the letter to my grandmother on the same type of blue air-mail stationery and mailed upon arrival in Landshut, about forty-five minutes later.



FIGURE 12. Myself on the left, with Elder Barry Barrus, my companion, beside a public water fountain near our apartment. Courtesy John W. Welch.

12. See Paul Gaechter, *Die literarische Kunst im Matthäus-Evangelium*, Stuttgarter Bibel-Studien 7 (Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1965), 30; see also Paul Gaechter, *Das Matthäus Evangelium* (Tyrolia, 1963), 548–84, where two years earlier Gaetcher had called special attention to chiastic literary structures in Matt. 1–28 (pp. 16–17); in the framework of Matt. 5:1–2 and 7:24–27 (p. 141); in the Beatitudes (p. 145), in Matt. 8–9 (p. 259); in Matt. 11:2–12:21, and 12:22–12:45 (p. 356); in a reverse ordering of Matt. 13 by Revelation 13 (429); in the extended reverse words in Matt. 13:10–18 (p. 435), the center of Matthew's gospel; also in the key elements in Matt. 14:1–16:20 (p. 469); in the nine element chiasm of Matt. 16:13–17:27 (p. 548); in Matt. 20:17–21:27 (p. 641); and in the overriding six element structure in Matt. 26:1–28:20 (p. 826). These structures are clearly summarized in his seventy-five-page 1965 introductory study that I am so grateful to have read just a couple of weeks earlier.

13. The key lines at the bottom of this page were previously included in Welch, "Discovery of Chiasmus," 82.

Regensburg den 18. Aug. 1967

Dear Grandmother,

Greetings from Germany! What a wonderful summer we've been having - gorgeous weather, inspirational work, and rich blessings! It sounds like the whole family has gone in different directions seeking the summer leisure - if any of them intrude in on you, say "hi" for me and let them know that we've got big things on the boards!

Please excuse my scrawling handwriting - not only has it gotten worse but moreover I'm bouncing along the German Railway now headed for Landshut, a city in my district. Sunday I'll be the speaker in church, the rest of the time will be spent with my elders there. We really have a good district and love to work together for the Lord.

How have you been? Well and busy, I hope. I realize often how fast time and opportunity pass - can you imagine that my mission is well past 1/2 gone? Including the first trip, I've been in Europe almost 20 months now! I am looking forward to seeing you, sooner than it seems!

Right now about all I can think about is a discovery I made on Wed. morning. It's a great idea and I'm really excited about it - we've shown it to professors and theologians and no one can refute it! I can't explain it all but follow closely: A few weeks ago I found a book called "The Literary Art in the Gospel of Matthew" and for some reason couldn't put it down - it was simply great - The author argued brilliantly a new theory proving the original Hebrew tradition of Matthew, a difficult ~~and~~ problem, for we have only Greek manuscripts of the gospel. That Matt. was translated from Hebrew and that it is genuine can not be denied, so he says

FIGURE 13. Page 1 of my letter that same morning to my family, having shared chiasms in the Book of Mormon the two days before with several informed but unsuspecting people. Courtesy John W. Welch.

[page 1] Regensburg, August 18, 1967

Dear Grandmother,

Greetings from Germany! What a wonderful summer we've been having—gorgeous weather, inspirational work, and rich blessings! It sounds like the whole family has gone in different directions seeking the summer leisure—if any of them intrude in on you, say “hi” for me and let them know that we've got big things on the boards!

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Right now about all I can think about is a discovery I made on Wed[nesday] morning. It's a great idea and I'm really excited about it—we've shown it to professors and theologians and no one can refute it! I can't explain it all but follow closely: A few weeks ago I found a book called “The Literary Art in the Gospel of Matthew” and for some reason couldn't put it down—it was simply great—the author argued brilliantly a new theory proving the original Hebraic tradition of Matthew, a difficult problem, for we have only Greek manuscripts of the Gospel. That Matthew was translated from Hebrew and that it is genuine can not be denied, so he says [page 2] because of an exclusively Aramaic literary form which occurs repeatedly throughout the Gospel. This form is a closed form which he calls “symmetry” or “chiasmus,” constructed as follows:

a-b-a, or a-b-c . . . d . . . c-b-a.

For example:

A. Peter as foundation	Matt 16:13–20
B. Prophecy of suffering	16:21
C. Peter scolded	16:22–23
D. Follow Christ (“cross” v. 24)	16:24–28
E. Transfiguration	17:1–9
D. Return of Elijah (“suffer” v. 12)	17:10–13
C. All apostles scolded	17:20–21
B. Prophecy of suffering	17:22–23
A. Peter as temple director	17:24–27

See the symmetry! It's subtle. It's an acid test for a Hebraic narrative!

Well, you can guess what comes next. Every time that book said, “Hurrah for Matt[hew],” my mind was convinced that I could find the same in The book of Mormon! Well, that’s just what I’ve done, not once, but 5 (perhaps 7!) and not without a big push from the Lord. Benjamin was a scholar and Mosiah 2–5 is loaded with this very form!

For example:

Mosiah 2:9–27 (The first one)

A. Purpose of assembly	v. 9
B. What is man? “no more than mortal”	v. 10–11
C. Laws of Benjamin’s kingdom	v. 12–13
D. Service “one another”	v. 14–17
E. Climax—thank your Heavenly King	
D. Service “one <u>with</u> another”	v. 21
C. Laws of God’s Kingdom	v. 22
B. What is man? “no more than dust”	v. 23–26 v. 26
A. Purpose of the assembly	v. 27

If it’s good for Matthew, it’s good for Benjamin!

Other climaxes are dead giveaways (ch. 5:11)!

[page 3] Oh well, you get the idea. It’s a new idea (or is something like that already in print??) I couldn’t imagine where.

Tell me what you think of the possibilities—it’s a very convincing demonstration. I’ve got pages of details and comparisons work[ed] out.¹⁴

Enough.

Hope all the travels make it safe and successfully!

All have my love and thanks.

Gram, keep everyone on the right trail!

With love,

Jack

[P.S.] Dad—is there anything written on the subject? Is the form as old as Isaiah (Lehi) or Jeremiah? Could we show that it was highly influenced by Egyptian style as Mosiah 1:4 suggests?

14. On Thursday, I had started looking for chiasms in 1 Nephi and had spotted right away a few possibilities.

Conclusion

These two letters offer several important insights into the discovery and explication of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. In telling the story about what happened that Wednesday morning, August 16, 1967, I usually point out that it occurred early in the morning. It was still dark enough outside that I needed to turn on a light to read at our table. My companion was still sound asleep, and I woke him up about 5:45 a.m. to tell him with excitement what I had just found in the previous hour and a quarter or so. Thus, I figure the prompting must have come to me about 4:30 a.m. I am normally a sound sleeper and don't usually wake up at that time.

What woke me up? As I mention on page two of my letter to my grandmother and family, this happened partly because I had been mulling over the day or two before some of the implications of many things that Paul Gaechter had written. But more than that, it all came with "a big push from the Lord." As I recall, the words that woke me up said: "If it is evidence of Hebrew style in the Gospel of Matthew, *it must be* evidence of Hebrew style in the Book of Mormon." I had probably wondered something along that line the previous day or two as I was working my way through Gaechter's eighty-two-page paperback in German, but the full force of that idea did not hit me until that early morning wake-up call. And, knowing my usual sleep habits, I like to point out that the real miracle that morning was that I got out of bed.

Why did I begin by looking that morning in Mosiah 4, instead of in 1 Nephi or any other place? Before we turned off the lights on Tuesday night at our regular bedtime of 22:30 (German time), my companion and I had been reading in Mosiah 4. So, I opened the book where we happened to leave off. I read one page at the end of Mosiah 4, and not seeing anything there, I turned over page 139, which ended with Mosiah 5:7, and suddenly spotted in the middle in the lefthand column, in Mosiah 5:11, the midpoint of the first chiasm found in the Book of Mormon (see fig. 14).

The reason that turning point jumped off the page at me was because of the way in which two long German words, *Übertretung, Übertretung* [transgression, transgress], had been stacked on the inside margin in the middle of that page.¹⁵ While such a "stack" is not usually thought to be the best typesetting practice, it was probably unavoidable here because of the length of those two German words. For me, it was like a spotlight, drawing my attention exactly to that center point. And this central repetition in that German edition of the Book of Mormon is more precise than it is in the English. In English, the two words at the turning point

15. For a picture of that page, see Welch, "The Discovery of Chiasmus," 79.

Der Name

Gleichnis

140 LüB 76:24
Psal 2:7

MOSIAH, 6.

John 10:4

er euch geistig gezeugt; denn ihr sagt ja, daß eure Herzen durch den Glauben an seinen Namen umgewandelt sind; daher seid ihr aus ihm geboren und seine Söhne und Töchter geworden.

B 8. Unter diesem Namen seid ihr frei gemacht worden, und ihr könnt durch keinen andern Namen frei gemacht werden. Die Seligkeit kommt durch keinen andern Namen⁴; daher möchte ich, daß ihr alle, die ihr ein Bündnis mit Gott gemacht habt, bis ans Ende eures Lebens gehorsam zu sein, den Namen Christi auf euch nehmt⁵.

9. Und [] wer das tut, wird zur rechten Hand Gottes befunden werden, denn er wird den Namen kennen, mit dem er genannt ist; denn er wird nach Christi Namen⁶ genannt werden.

C 10. Dann [] muß ein jeder, der den Namen Christi nicht auf sich nimmt, mit einem andern Namen genannt werden; daher wird er seinen Platz zur linken Hand Gottes finden.

D 11. Und ich möchte, daß ihr auch bedachtet, daß dies der Name ist, den ich euch, wie ich sagte, geben wollte und der niemals ausgelöscht werden soll⁷, es sei denn durch Übertretung; hütet euch daher vor Übertretung, damit der Name nicht aus eurem Herzen ausgelöscht werde.

12. Ich sage euch: Ihr dürft nicht vergessen, den Namen⁸ immer in eurem Herzen geschrieben zu behalten,

C damit ihr nicht zur linken Hand⁹ Gottes befunden werdet, sondern die Stimme hört und kennt, die euch ruft, und auch den Namen, womit er euch rufen wird.

B 13. Denn wie kennt der Mensch

einen Herrn, dem er nicht gedient hat, der ihm ein Fremder ist, von den Gedanken und Absichten seines Herzens weit entfernt? Eph 2:19

14. Und weiter: Wird der Mensch einen Nächsten Esel nehmen und für ihn sorgen? Ich sage euch: Nein; er wird sogar nicht dulden, daß er unter seinen Herden weide, sondern ihn fortreiben und hinausstoßen. Ich sage euch, daß es auch unter euch so sein wird, wenn ihr den Namen¹⁰ nicht kennt, nach dem ihr genannt seid.

A 15. Daher möchte ich, daß ihr standhaft und unbeweglich seid, immer voll guter Werke, damit Christus, der Herr¹¹, der allmächtige Gott, euch als die Seinen versiegle, und ihr in den Himmel gebracht werden und immerwährende Seligkeit und ewiges Leben durch die Weisheit, Macht, Gerechtigkeit und Gnade dessen haben möchtet, der alle Dinge im Himmel und auf Erden erschuf¹² und Gott über alles ist. Amen. Eph. 1:13

Kapitel 6

Die Namen der Gläubigen werden aufgezeichnet. — Priester ernannt. — Anfang der Regierung Mosiahs. — Tod König Benjamins.

1. Nachdem König Benjamin diese Rede an sein Volk beendigt hatte, hielt er es für ratsam, die Namen aller derer zu verzeichnen, die einen Bund mit Gott gemacht und gelobt hatten, seine Gebote zu halten.

2. Und [] es war niemand unter ihnen, außer den kleinen Kindern, der nicht dem Bündnis beigetreten war und den Namen Christi¹ auf sich genommen hatte.

3. [] Nachdem König Benjamin alle

(3) Mos. 27: 24—27. Al. 5: 14, 49. 22: 15. 36: 23, 26. 38: 6. Joh. 1: 13. 3: 3. Tit. 3: 5. — (4) 1. Ne. 10: 6, 2. Ne. 2: 8. 11: 6. 25: 20. 31: 21. Mos. 4: 8. 13: 28. 15: 19. 16: 4. Al. 21: 9. 34: 9. 38: 9. Apdg. 4: 12. — (5) Verse 9—14. Mos. 26: 18. 34. Al. 1: 19. 5: 38. 34: 38. 3. Ne. 27: 5—9. Morm. 8: 38. — (6) siehe 5. — (7) Mos. 1: 11, 12. — (8) siehe 5. — (9) Vers 10. — (10) siehe 5. — (11) Mos. 3: 5, 17, 18, 21. — (12) Mos. 3: 8. 4: 2. Al. 11: 39. 3. Ne. 9: 15. Morm. 9: 17. Eth. 3: 14—16. 4: 7. Kol. 1: 16. — KAP. 6: (1) siehe 5, Mos. 5. Ungefähr um 124 v. Chr.

FIGURE 14. Page of Mosiah 5 with the markings and marginal notations I made on or shortly after August 18, 1967. Courtesy John W. Welch.

are *transgression* (a noun) and *transgress* (a verb), but in German they had been rendered as two identical nouns. That exact repetition made that central turning point even more obvious to me.

After that, I noticed the three terms “left hand of God,” “name,” and “blotted out,” which are then repeated in the opposite order, “blotted out,” “name,” “left hand of God,” coming right before and right after the turning point. In the margin of verses 7–15, I wrote the letters A, B, C, D, C, B, A (see fig. 14).

Next, I wondered if King Benjamin had done anything else like this in his written speech that he circulated and delivered at the coronation of his son.¹⁶ And so, I looked back to the beginning of that speech in Mosiah 2, where I quickly noticed the symmetry in Mosiah 2:9–27, which centers on verse 19, where Benjamin asks, if I your “king” deserve any “thanks” for being in your service, then how much more should you “thank” your “heavenly King.” In my German Book of Mormon, I marked that point as the climax of that section.

I then noted another symmetry in Mosiah 2:31–41, centering on 2:37.

And, on the bottom of the next page in my Book of Mormon, I sketched out an A, B, C, B, A pattern in Mosiah 3:11–27, centering on 3:19, repeating twice “the natural man,” “the natural man,” which turns out to be the exact midpoint of King Benjamin’s entire speech (see fig. 15).

After noticing these chiasms, I eagerly woke up my companion, Elder Barrus. After all, by then it was time to get up. I remember startling him, saying something like, “Bruder! It’s here!”¹⁷ I showed him quickly what I had found; he was interested, but it was too early to be very excited.

As we went out on the streets that morning, we showed a few random people about this pattern in the Book of Mormon. Of course, they had no idea what I was talking about. But that afternoon and on Thursday, we knocked on the office doors of some priests and even of a professor. I had been hoping to find something in the Book of Mormon that would interest those scholarly devoted Catholics, if only a little bit. Those initial conversations did not turn out very well, but they helped us to see how we could improve our delivery of this idea and humbly show others what had been found.

A year later, on my way home from Germany, I was given permission to visit Paul Gaechter in his cloister in Innsbruck, Austria, not far from our mission office in Munich where I had been serving. I had previously

16. See the eventual development of this topic in John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”* (Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998), especially chapters 3, 8, and 11.

17. *Bruder* is the German cognate of the English word *brother*.

Erlösung

state of man -

2 Ne. 2
Alma 42

MOSIAH, 3.

135

Vater des Himmels und der Erde, der Schöpfer aller Dinge von Anfang an; und seine Mutter wird Maria⁶ heißen.
9. Und siehe, er kommt zu den Seinen, damit die Menschenkinder durch Glauben an seinen Namen Seligkeit erlangen; und selbst nach dem allem wird man ihn als einen Menschen betrachten und sagen, er habe den Teufel, und man wird ihn geißeln und kreuzigen.⁷ **Jes 3:13**

10. Und am dritten Tage⁸ wird er von den Toten auferstehen; und siehe, er steht, die Welt zu richten; und alle diese Dinge werden geschehen, damit ein gerechtes Gericht über die Menschenkinder komme. **Joh 3:19-21**

11. Denn siehe, sein Blut sühnt⁹ auch die Sünden derer, die durch die Übertretung Adams gefallen und gestorben sind, ohne den Willen Gottes in bezug auf sich gekannt zu haben, oder für die, welche unwissentlich gesündigt haben¹⁰. **1 Mos. 4:18**

12. Aber wehe, wehe dem, der weiß, daß er sich gegen Gott empört! Denn Seligkeit kommt zu keinem solchen, es sei denn durch Buße und Glauben an den Herrn Jesus Christus.

13. Und Gott der Herr hat seine heiligen Profeten unter alle Menschenkinder gesandt, um diese Dinge allen Völkern, Geschlechtern und Sprachen zu verkündigen, daß alle, die glauben, daß Christus kommen wird, durch sie Vergabe ihrer Sünden erlangen und sich mit außerordentlich großer Freude freuen möchten, gerade ob er schon unter sie gekommen wäre.

14. Aber Gott, der Herr, sah, daß sein Volk ein halbstarriges Volk war, und er gab ihm ein Gesetz, selbst das Gesetz Moses¹¹.

15. Und er zeigte ihm viele Zeichen, Wunder und Sinnbilder und gab viele Hinweise auf sein Kommen; und auch heilige Profeten redeten zu ihm von seinem Kommen; und doch verhارتete es sein Herz und verstand nicht, daß das Gesetz Moses nichts nützt, es sei denn durch die Versöhnung seines Blutes¹².

16. Und wenn es möglich wäre, daß kleine Kinder sündigten, könnten sie nicht selig werden; aber ich sage dir, sie sind gesegnet, denn siehe, so wie sie durch Adam oder durch die Natur fallen, so sühnt auch das Blut Christi ihre Sünden¹³.

17. Und überdies sage ich dir, daß kein ander Name gegeben werden wird, auch kein ander Weg und kein andres Mittel, wodurch Seligkeit auf die Menschenkinder kommen kann, als nur in und durch den Namen Christi, des allmächtigen Gottes.

18. Denn siehe, er richtet, und sein Gericht ist gerecht; und das Kind¹⁴, das in seiner Kindheit stirbt, kommt nicht um; die Menschen aber trinken die Verdammnis ihrer eignen Seele, wenn sie sich nicht demütigen und wie kleine Kinder werden und glauben, daß die Seligkeit war und ist und kommen wird durch das versöhnende Blut Christi¹⁵, des allmächtigen Gottes.

19. Denn der natürliche Mensch ist ein Feind Gottes und ist es seit Adams Fall gewesen, und wird es immer und ewig sein, (wenn) er nicht auf die Eingebungen des heiligen Geistes hört, den natürlichen Menschen ablegt und durch die Versöhnung des Herrn Jesus Christus ein Heiliger und wie ein Kind wird, untertägig, sanft, demütig, geduldig und voller Liebe und willens,

(6) Al. 7:10. — (7) 1. Ne. 11:33. 19:10, 13. 2. Ne. 6:9. 10:3. 25:13. Mos. 15:7. 3. Ne. 11:14, 15. — (8) 1. Ne. 19:10. 2. Ne. 25:13. He. 14:20, 27. 3. Ne. 10:9. — (9) siehe 6, 2. Ne. 2. — (10) 2. Ne. 9:25, 26. Mos. 3:20—22. 15:24, 25. Al. 9:15, 16, 29:5. 42:21. He. 15:14, 15. Moro. 8:22. — (11) siehe 15, 2. Ne. 25. — (12) siehe 6, 2. Ne. 2. — (13) Verse 18, 19. Mos. 15:25. Moro. 8:8, 12, 22. — (14) siehe 13. — (15) siehe 6, 2. Ne. 2.

Al. 4:12
2 Ne 12:22
K. 2:58
1 Kor 2

v.18

A. Adam - wissendlich - Gesetz (v.11-14)
B. Kinder - keine Sündi - Christus (15-18)
C. Climax v.19
B. Christus (v.20) Kinder (v.21)
A. Gesetz (22-24) Bewußtsein (25) Adam (26)

FIGURE 15. Page of Mosiah 3 with the markings and marginal notations I made on or shortly after August 18, 1967. Courtesy John W. Welch.

corresponded with him, and I wanted, most of all, to thank him. He had become the provost (academic vice president) at the University of Innsbruck. Happily, on that occasion, my presentation and our extended conversation was very gratifying for both of us.¹⁸

Looking back on this unusual experience, fifty-eight years later, I am most struck by the number of “coincidences” that had to be in place for this to have just happened.

My own preparations had begun when I was in high school, when I just happened to have a Sunday school teacher, Douglas L. Callister, who was in law school at the University of Southern California. He had been entranced by Hugh Nibley, one of his teachers at BYU in the 1950s. He told us numerous inspiring Nibley stories. They motivated me at the time, as I was taking four years of AP Latin in high school.

Then, in 1964, I just happened to enroll as a freshman at BYU, instead of pursuing other attractive options. And there, I just happened to take Hugh Nibley’s Book of Mormon class my first semester. Because I had read some of Nibley’s books and articles a few years before and had learned a fair amount about his overall approach to using historical linguistics in studying the scriptures, seeing connections between the Book of Mormon and various civilizations throughout the ancient Near East and Egypt made great sense to me.

Then I would just happen to study at the University of Salzburg the next year, where I learned academic German and saw how German universities worked. I realized how, with my Austrian student credentials (my *Studienausweis*), I could attend any class at any institution of higher learning anywhere in Austria or Germany.

And then, somehow, I received my mission call, while I was there in Salzburg, to serve for two years just next door in South Germany—which had been one of Hugh Nibley’s mission areas in the 1920s.

A year later, I would be assigned to serve in the obscure, two-thousand-year-old Catholic center of German Catholicism: Regensburg. There, I just happened to see a schedule, posted on Domplatz, listing the 1967 summer academic lectures within the University of Regensburg system. One of those about the New Testament happened to catch my eye, and conveniently it would be held on our Friday preparation day, just down the street from our apartment. I happened to know how a lecture notice of that kind worked in the German academic system, and that lecture turned out to be about the recent book authored by Paul Gaechter—about Matthew’s use of chiasmus.

18. See the account of our conversation in Welch, “Discovery of Chiasmus,” 84–85.

Also, I had befriended one of the clerks at the main Catholic book-store there, and after that lecture, there just happened to be an unusual copy of Gaechter's new monograph about Matthew's use of chiasmus on one of their shelves. And that was just the beginning.

When I returned to BYU after my mission in September 1968, Hugh Nibley was the first person I told about chiasmus. After a lengthy conversation with him in his dining room, which lasted into the wee hours of the night, he offered, on the spot, to serve on my committee if I would write this all up and then do a master's thesis on chiasmus in ancient literatures and in the Book of Mormon. I was only a junior at that time, but all of that soon came to pass in remarkable ways in 1969 and 1970.¹⁹ Such coincidences and blessings just kept unfolding.

Regarding the timing of this discovery, it might also seem noteworthy that in August 1967, some Egyptian papyri surfaced at the New York Metropolitan Museum. While that development brought on a wave of problems for the Church in some scholarly circles, one can wonder if the timing of the discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon at that very same time was somehow fortune's way of coincidentally keeping the scales balanced. As an often-stated aphorism says, "Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous."

Now, in addition to all these several coincidences, one may now include the fortunate survival of my letter, written and sent on August 18, 1967, to Robert K. Thomas. As a signal of the patient, not-entirely-anonymous working of God's hands behind the scenes in our lives, all this makes even more manifest what a marvelous work and a miraculous wonder the Book of Mormon and the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ truly are.²⁰

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19. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," 69–84; John W. Welch, *A Study Relating Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon to Chiasmus in the Old Testament, Ugaritic Epics, Homer, and Selected Greek and Latin Authors* (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1970).

20. For many more documents regarding the overall chiasmus story, see the online archive at Scripture Central, <https://scripturecentral.org/archive/all>; and the John W. Welch Chiasmus Papers, BYU Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, https://archives.lib.byu.edu/repositories/ltpsc/resources/upb_mss3776; and on the web at Chiasmus Resources, <https://chiasmusresources.org/>.

The Planting of the Lord

Mary Ackerman

To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified. —Isaiah 61:3

Is it possible for one verse of scripture to perfectly describe the trajectory of a life?

Stave 1. Ashes.

In the first grade, my teacher asked me, “Why do you wear the same dress every day?” I was uncomfortable with the question. I hadn’t realized that anyone noticed, and I wasn’t sure how to answer her. I looked down at my faded yellow plaid dress and realized for the first time that something was wrong. That realization marked the beginning of my awareness that I wasn’t being cared for in the way other children were. While I continued to wear the dress, now it was accompanied by a large dose of shame.

As a US Army brat, I grew up with parents who were usually lost in their own world of alcohol and codependency. They neglected us¹ while they shared endless conversations and unlimited alcoholic beverages at the kitchen table night after night—weekends and holidays included. I vividly picture them in my mind: sitting at that Formica table,

1. When I say “we” and “us,” I’m referring to two sisters and one brother. I’m the second child in our line of succession.

knocking off “old soldiers” (their name for bottles of alcohol). We were never invited into their tight circle of two.

We dressed ourselves, made our own meals, and even tucked ourselves into bed—if you could call it that. There were no bedtime rituals. No brushing of teeth or bathing or lullabies or prayers or “tucking” in. If we were quiet, we could stay up as late as we wanted, which we did. Sleep deprivation was a constant in my life, and I still suffer from a sleep disorder that I attribute to my childhood.

After retirement from the Army, Dad became a college professor. He was up and out the door on weekday mornings. His weekends were spent in bed until late morning. On the other hand, Mom always struggled with mornings; she was rarely awake to see us off to school. We dressed and groomed ourselves. It was a rare occasion to be given breakfast or provided with lunch. By the time dinner arrived, around eight or nine o’clock at night, I would be ravenous.

While the physical neglect was clear—lackluster energy, dirty clothes, grungy hair, the same dress every day—the emotional toll was less visible but no less brutal. Every day of third grade began in distress. I remember being deeply humiliated as my classmates and I would line up at the door, waiting to present our nails for inspection. The teacher would go down the line, awarding a star for each child with clean nails. I always placed myself at the back of the line so I could frantically scrape the dirt from underneath my nails before it was my turn. But no matter how hard I tried, the grime was never fully gone.

I wanted to blend in and avoid the notice of others, even to disappear. But that desire came at a cost. It meant that I never learned to ask for help in a direct way, never learned to trust that others would care for me.

Stave 2. Mourning.

We did not hug, kiss, or say, “I love you” in our household. I was starved for affection. The one time I remember my mom telling me she loved me (at ten years old or so), she was drunk. Her words wafted in on her breath, heavy with alcohol. I recoiled and didn’t believe a word of it. I do now, but not then.²

2. To be fair to Mom, as I shared these life experiences with my siblings, they told me they had vastly different experiences with her. I was astounded to learn this. My oldest sister recently told me that Mom always said I was too “prickly,” and she didn’t know how to relate to me. I only knew that we were not connected.

In another memory when I was eight years old, my older sister and I received corsages for some occasion. I don't remember the event, but I do remember how I took mine off and tore it to pieces as we walked along the Bolivian street. I threw it on the ground in an act of anger that I couldn't even explain. Later, in tears, I blamed my sister, telling my parents that Betsy had torn it up. She, being way more credible, told them the truth, and I was punished—grounded in my room. I didn't know why I did the things I did.

I needed help without knowing how to ask for it in healthy ways. Instead, I lied—often. I told stories, exaggerated my experiences, and created tales of daring adventures, of places I had been and people I had met. I never took responsibility for my actions; I was too afraid to tell the truth if I was confronted. What would they think of me? It didn't matter whether the attention I received from family was positive or negative—I just wanted to be noticed, to exist in someone's awareness, to be *seen*. But each time I lied, I also felt a wave of shame wash over me. It was a vicious cycle. The lies became a source of self-loathing.

By the time I was twelve, I was clinically depressed. The seeds of that depression were planted long before I had a name for it—before I could understand the heavy weight that pressed down on my chest and filled my thoughts. I was deeply unhappy, and I couldn't quite figure out why. I was convinced that if anyone truly saw me—the real me—they would hate me. I was certain that I was unlovable, unworthy of affection or connection.

Stave 3. The Spirit of Heaviness.

I didn't just suffer from unreliable meals; there was also a deep sense of insecurity that followed me from day to day. I never knew what might happen next, and the unpredictability left me unsettled.

My childhood lacked the kind of supervision and structure that most kids take for granted. One day, when I was eight years old, a friend and I decided to take a walk (in Bolivia). We wandered farther and farther from home, spellbound as we counted the dead dogs floating in the river to the left of us (there were many). Before we realized it, we had traveled a long way from home. When we stopped to look around, we noticed a black van nearby, creeping closer to us as we walked. In a panic, we took off running, terrified that we were being followed. I didn't tell my parents. That was one of the unspoken rules: If something dangerous happened, you kept it to yourself. You didn't make waves; you didn't ask for help.

This pattern continued into my adolescence. I recall one summer in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, when my younger sister and I went swimming in the sea, completely alone. Our parents were back at the RV, drinking with strangers they'd met on the trip. We didn't notice the strong undertow, and before we knew it, we had been swept out beyond a safe depth. My sister swam back to shore, but I was a poor swimmer. Exhausted, I was trapped in the waves, treading water, and screaming for help. I could hear my sister shouting from the shore, but it felt like no one would come. Eventually, some adults passing by noticed and rushed in to rescue me. As we sat on the beach afterwards, shaken, my sister and I made a pact not to mention it to my folks.

Even the simple act of going places with my parents was tense. One night, after a dinner out, my father mistook a neighbor's driveway for our own and drove into their mailbox. One morning, I found him passed out in the front seat. I felt a consistent sense that anything could go wrong at any moment. By the time I was seventeen and had my driver's license, I became the designated driver. They were completely fine with it. Problem solved.

As a teenager, I could go anywhere, any time, and stay out as late as I wished. My parents were never sober enough to be aware. This freedom left me vulnerable. I didn't know how to set healthy boundaries or how to protect myself, emotionally or physically. I was left to make decisions in a vacuum, with no safety net to fall back on. This freedom had a price: I was isolated, unprepared, and vulnerable to making choices that would have lasting consequences.

Stave 4. Beauty, the Oil of Joy, and the Garment of Praise.

There was one defining moment that shifted the trajectory of my life: the day the missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints knocked on our door when I was thirteen years old. Miraculously, my mother let them in, and this simple act opened a door to a life that I could never have imagined. My sister and I began attending lessons after dinner, where the missionaries taught us about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Soon, the members of the little Dover Branch in New Jersey reached out to me, welcoming me into their homes, inviting me to Sunday services, dances, and social events. They didn't just invite me to church—they invited me into their lives. They became my new family and community, filling my emotional void. For the first time, I experienced what it felt like to be truly embraced, loved, and cared for. For many

years, they made sure I had rides to church and activities, which was especially important given the distance we traveled to get to Church meetings. They loved me, and their kindness began to heal some of the deep wounds I carried. Betsy didn't see what I saw, but I was baptized on June 22, 1966.

Just in time, I learned there were other choices I could make, and a pathway of light began to open. For the first time, I had hope. The darkness of my past was still there, but the light of faith shone out in my wilderness. Baptism led to my graduation from BYU, a mission to Guatemala, marriage in the temple to a faithful, lovely man, and five fabulous children. God's hand was visible in my life, but it wasn't an instant transformation. It took decades to feel the love God has for me, to understand that his Atonement applies to me.

I struggled with feelings of worthlessness, depression, and anxiety for many years, even after my baptism. Therapy and medication began to help me manage my mental health, but the process of healing was long and difficult. I repented and stayed loyal to my faith, even when I didn't feel God's love. I always felt that one day, I would feel his love and know that he was with me.

That day came when I was sixty-three years old, almost fifty years to the day of my baptism. For the first time, I felt God's love flood through me, an overwhelming sensation that filled me completely. I was born again—not in the dramatic sense, but in a quiet, profound moment of peace and clarity. The years of struggling, waiting, and working through my pain had finally brought me to a place of grace. He healed me.

Now, at seventy years old, I can say that I have been blessed beyond anything I could ever have imagined—from the simple acts of kindness I received from the Saints to the miracles of healing that came slowly over the years. I have conquered neglect, hunger, insecurity, depression, and anxiety—not through my own strength but through the grace of God. I feel his love often now, and I feel the Spirit guiding me daily.

The struggle was not in vain. Every trial, every moment of waiting, was part of God's plan to bring me closer to him. And though the journey was difficult, I now see that each step was necessary for me to grow, to change, and to become the person I am today.

People often ask me if all the years of waiting, struggling, and enduring were worth it. My answer is simple, but it comes from the depth of my heart: Yes! It is worth every moment, every single second of my hard times, to have come, at last, to live in Christ. To those who may still be waiting—whether for healing, for peace, or for answers—my message is

this: Trust God. Never quit believing that he loves you, especially when you can't feel it. Never give up!

So, to answer my own question, is it possible for one verse of scripture to perfectly describe the trajectory of a life? The answer is an emphatic yes! All are appointed to mourn, whether in childhood or later, but God provides beauty, the oil of joy, and the garment of praise as a counter to our ashes, mourning, and the heaviness of life. We may feel like a withered weed planted in rocky soil, but God sees a tree of righteousness and glory.

This essay by Mary Ackerman won second place in the 2025 BYU Studies Personal Essay Contest.

The Genesis Creation, Eden, and Flood Accounts' Relationship to Natural History in the Light of Recent Bible Scholarship on Ancient Worldviews

What's in It for Latter-day Saints?

Eric A. Eliason

Understanding Ancient Narratives' Intended Relationship to Science

For over a hundred years, growing mountains of mutually reinforcing evidence have exponentially increased our knowledge of biology, geology, and astronomy. This has brought into ever-clearer focus a natural history seemingly impossible to square with the Genesis accounts of the Creation, Eden, and the Flood. Bible believers have responded to this in a variety of ways. All too commonly, some simply stop believing in the Bible and leave the fold altogether. Others have invented implausible new interpretations in an attempt to "update" Bible understandings to fit new scientific information. More conservative believers rightly see such updated readings as veering wildly from the text's plain meaning and improperly evading scriptural authority. However, a laudable desire to stay true to scripture has also unfortunately led many faithful down the specious dead-end paths of creationism and "intelligent design," which require wholesale denial of vast swaths of well-attested evidence. Anyone wishing to both hold to Biblical reliability and accept scientific discoveries is left in a pickle, with seemingly nowhere very satisfying to turn. As a Brigham Young University professor who has taught courses on the Bible as well as on human evolution, I have never been satisfied telling students, "There indeed seem to be stark differences between science and Genesis. I wish I could point you to a good harmonization. But the attempts I know of embarrassingly botch either the science or the Bible or both. Since both science and revealed religion regularly incorporate new insights that overturn old understandings, I trust a sensible reconciliation will someday

emerge.” Fortunately, I don’t tell my students this anymore because now I have John H. Walton’s books to point to.¹

It would be an overstatement, but only a slight one, to say that Walton’s assembled evidence neatly dissolves most issues inherent in wishing to take both the Bible and science seriously. Walton and his collaborators draw on hundreds of years of accumulated scholarship to read scripture and understand the cosmos through the eyes of the Bible’s writers and earliest readers. His approach seeks *neither* to “resolve contradictions” *nor* to “find common ground.” And unlike creationists’ attempts to propose alternate answers to science’s findings, Walton has no beef with science and leaves it alone to do its own thing, unafraid of what it might discover. Neither does he subject the Bible’s authority to “scientific oversight.” Instead, he employs a radical literalism (“out-literalizing” the literalists) in reconstructing the Bible’s earliest cultural and literary context. He uses this lens to bring into focus the most likely earliest meanings of Genesis and—like a Boy Scout with a magnifying glass—vaporize a host of incorrect interpretive traditions.

Walton starts with two simple premises. First, we should pay close attention to what the Bible actually says, not ignoring anything that *is* there and not imagining the presence of anything that is *not* there—*especially* not today’s cosmology, familiar to any grade-school student—namely, that the earth, moon, and sun are all spheres; that the earth orbits the sun; and that stars are other suns—giant burning gas-balls separated from each other by unimaginably vast distances. None of this bears any resemblance to what Bible authors wrote. It is simply not there in the text.

Second, we should discern the Bible’s most likely meanings through the eyes of its earliest readers’ cultural, literary, and cosmological understandings. (To Latter-day Saints, this may sound like a “restoration” of original meanings and a co-witness to our belief that the Lord speaks to people “according to . . . their [own] understanding” [2 Ne. 31:3].) By following this method, and by setting aside some hoary interpretive assumptions (that may seem as old as scripture but are not), Walton shows that scientific discoveries in *no* way preclude a wholehearted and serious acceptance of the Bible’s earliest and fullest meanings. In fact,

1. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (IVP Academic, 2009); John H. Walton with N. T. Wright, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (IVP Academic, 2015); Tremper Longman III and John H. Walton with Stephen O. Moshier, *The Lost World of the Flood: Mythology, Theology, and the Deluge Debate* (IVP Academic, 2018).

this method allows the Genesis accounts to become even more robustly alive and relevant to readers today.

Walton doesn't claim that the Bible proves any scientific discovery, only that what it does claim leaves plenty of room for many possible explanations for the material creation of the world. This includes the scenarios that science has uncovered. According to Walton, Genesis was not intended to be a description of *how* God created the material world and cosmos, but it does touch on *why* he did and what the world is for. Genesis *does* tell the story of God establishing on Earth the conditions necessary for our salvation.

Walton's approach differs from paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould's famous plea for "non-overlapping magisteria"—an expedient truce where science and religion each stay in their own lanes, with religion sticking to the spiritual and science to the material.² Instead, Walton persuasively demonstrates that Bible authors never even sought to tell a story about natural history. (So how could they be wrong about something they are not even talking about?) They just used their day's common worldview as a backdrop on which to present the more important story they really wanted to tell.

Walton's approach also differs from efforts to "update" traditional Bible interpretations to conform them to scientific findings. Walton would have no part in such an endeavor. He is an Old Testament professor at Wheaton College, one of American Evangelicals' premiere higher-education institutions. He has impeccable credentials within conservative religious circles as well as in the secular world of ancient Near Eastern scholarship. He rejects the view of creationist readings of Genesis as necessary because *the Bible itself* makes such readings extraneous.

Walton does not attack or even mention creationism's problems. His findings don't actually preclude the possibility of creationism's validity. Walton's findings only render the creationist enterprise completely unnecessary and irrelevant to interpreting the Bible properly, regarding it as factually authoritative, or giving it its due deference. It is just not needed. Some fundamentalists may not appreciate Walton thoroughly undercutting any perceived obligation to expend any more energy on a project into which they have sunk so much for so long. (Unfortunately, creationism has undermined Christian moral witness in many arenas

2. Stephen Jay Gould, *The Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (Ballantine Books, 2002), 58, 63, 65.

beyond science. It is *not* a hold-fast continuation of ancient understandings, as its proponents imagine. It is actually a recent innovation responding to and incorporating core aspects of modernity. Our age's recently emerging conceits about what narratives are for, how to present them, and the ostensible necessity of fixing them at some point along a linear conception of time would all have been alien to ancients who thought of time as cyclical. For example, the earliest Christians lived long before anyone had an inkling of organic evolution, making belief or disbelief in it a spurious litmus test for Christian authenticity.) While fundamentalists may dislike Walton's results, they cannot so easily reject his interpretive method—since it is the very hermeneutic that conservative Protestants have always promoted as the most reliable one.

Ancient Worldviews and the Plain Meanings of Bible Creation Narratives

The following is an example of Walton's method in action. A close reading of Genesis chapter 1 shows God forming the earth as a flat land separated from a vast expanse of unformed watery chaos ("the deep") that surrounded it (Gen. 1:2, 6, 10). He put an expansive dome, like a giant slab or upside-down bowl (a "firmament"), over his creation that kept out the watery chaos pressing in from all sides (Gen. 1:7). God called this firmament "Heaven" (Gen. 1:8), leaving one to wonder where he resided before he created it. The Lord had already separated light from darkness before he divided day from night (Gen. 1:3–5). And only after this did he set the sun and moon on tracks that went around the inside of the dome and affixed the stars on it as pinpoints of light (Gen. 1:14–18). When it rains, literal "windows" of heaven (a better translation might be "floodgates") open in the dome to let water gush in and down to the earth below. During the Deluge, God also opened the "fountains of the great deep" to let the all-encompassing waters burst up from below as well (Gen. 7:11; see Mal. 3:10).

Has your modern education made it difficult to see the sky as the inside of a dome? If so, simply go outside and take a look. You will quickly grasp why the sky has often been so conceived. Also ask yourself if the stars at night look like pinpoints of light or giant burning balls of gas? The ancient Hebrews were not alone in such conceptions. Norse mythology saw the sky as the inside of a slain frost giant's skull. Presumably, that is why it is blue, as well as concave. In depicting the sky, Bible authors have written not only to their own times but to the widely

held understandings of virtually everyone who has ever lived, except for those few of us with modern Western-style educations, in this last eye-blink of world history.

The idea of creation beginning with the gods forcing back the all-present churning chaos (and the identification of the sea with the vast unformed primordial turmoil) was the prevailing understanding in many ancient Near Eastern societies. Since the days when German was the leading language of ancient Near Eastern scholarship, scholars have called this episode the *Chaoskampf*, or “struggle against Chaos.” Compared to the long-winded creation accounts of Babylonian, Egyptian, and Canaanite mythology, the ancient Hebrews’ relatively demythologized and sparse narrative assumes a familiarity with, but does not much elaborate on, these common cosmological concepts. The Bible even makes numerous references to Leviathan, or Rahab, the primordial monster of many mythologies, associated with—or the symbol of, or the embodiment of, or perhaps even the very same as—“the deep” of Genesis 1:2.³ The gods fought and subdued this unruly monstrosity to begin creating and bringing order to the world. Again, the Bible does not much develop a distinctive Hebrew conception of Leviathan but assumes readers will be familiar enough with this trope to catch its references’ significance.

In comparative mythological perspective, perhaps the most noteworthy feature of Hebrew scripture’s version of the *Chaoskampf* is the ease with which it is accomplished. (Surely this is a sly dig at other nations’ feeble gods, who needed to exert considerable effort to create.) Genesis 1 depicts no epic-length recounting of a titanic battle where the gods mightily fought to subdue the deep (or its avatar). The Bible’s creator-god simply speaks, and the waters instantly obey his will. Also, except for one cryptic reference to making humans in “*our* image, after *our* likeness,”⁴ the God of Genesis also seems perfectly capable of working alone. Though “the deep” implies Leviathan’s presence, that Chaos Monster—that we know Hebrews knew about from frequent references elsewhere in the Bible—does not even overtly show up in Genesis 1’s depiction of the big “fight day.” Perhaps Leviathan was too scared to

3. Leviathan, or Rahab, is implicit in “the deep” of Genesis 1 and shows up more explicitly, often by name, in Job 40:15–24; 41:1–34; Psalms 74:13–14; 104:25–26; Isaiah 27:1; 51:9; and perhaps Amos 9:3 and Revelation 13:1.

4. Genesis 1:26 (English Standard Version), emphasis added.

come out of the water. In Job 41:1–11, the Lord fills in some details missing from Genesis 1 when he asks Job if the puny man is like God, a being who can catch Leviathan with a fishhook and lead him around by the nose, making the fearsome sea monster into a pet or plaything—like a goldfish in a bowl, perhaps. Comparative ancient Near Eastern mythology is Walton’s area of particular expertise, and he provides an extensive bibliography on the subject.

According to Walton, reading scripture through the eyes of its earliest audience should also centrally inform our understanding of the Bible’s Flood narrative. The Deluge covered “the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 8:9) as certainly as a firmament or dome held back the waters that caused it. This is literally true according to the understandings of the text’s authors and earliest readers. To ask whether authors intended Australia, the Americas, and Himalayan peaks in their conception of “the face of the whole earth” verges on silliness. Earliest Bible audiences had no conception of such places, which have only recently come to figure into Bible readers’ guesses as to what “the face of the whole earth” might mean. To the first writing civilizations—which emerged from the oft-flooding, but very fertile, Nile and Euphrates flood plains—“the face of the whole earth” *was* these flood plains.⁵ To them, believing the Bible’s Flood narrative would hardly require the leap of faith it does for us. There is a good reason they are called “flood plains” after all.

Ancient narratives around the beginnings of the known world—sometimes called “myths” by scholars, not to disparage them, but as a technical term for a narrative genre—are not only true because they happened once a long time ago, but much more importantly, they are true because they illuminate what *is* happening, all of the time, over and over again. Myths contain foundational truths about the nature of the world and the human condition. The Genesis Flood may well have covered the whole planet as we conceive it, but we perhaps ought to hesitate before conscripting the Bible into any fight for the necessity of this belief. Bible authors likely did not seek to address any anachronistic issues, such as what a “planet” is or whether the term “earth” refers to anything remotely like what we imagine today, when they used the phrase “whole face of the earth.”

5. There is no capitalization in the Hebrew to help distinguish *earth*, as in “soil,” from the more recent *Earth*, as in “the third planet from the sun.”

None of this means that Bible authors intended to tell the story of a local flood. They didn't. In fact, they are clear in a number of places that they very much intended to convey the idea of a flood that uniquely, just this once, engulfed all of Creation (Gen. 6:1, 13, 17; 9:11, 15). They are kind of over-the-top about it, actually. But their conception of how large an area Creation entailed was simply smaller in size than what we imagine today. Nevertheless, what the Bible portrays is far more dramatic and total even than today's rather circumspect literalists' assertion that the flood waters only formed a relatively thin film over the surface of only one small planet out of billions and billions in the vast openness of an impossibly huge universe. To ancients, the whole of Creation was one tiny bubble precariously surrounded by vast, unformed, uncreated, roiling, thick, watery chaos. The Great Flood popped this tiny bubble, thoroughly filling it, and dissolved it fully back into the vast measureless deep out of which it was formed—like it never existed. Think of Noah's ark like a Jaredite barge, fully surrounded not just by the sea but by *all* the water that was now all of *everything*, until God began to create again, making a new tiny bubble by separating “the waters from the waters” a second time (Gen. 1:6).

However, in attempting to convey totality, Bible authors were probably using hyperbole for the rhetorical effect of making a theological point—demonstrating God's all-encompassing authority over, and purposes for, his creation. This is *not* downplaying or modifying the Bible's original meaning to make it fit with science. It is a *return* to the Bible's original intended meaning by acknowledging that hyperbolic “exaggeration for effect” was a common rhetorical tool, knowingly used by Bible authors and understood as conventional by its earliest readers.⁶ To ignore the Bible's use of hyperbole and insist on its sober accuracy in passages where this was not its purpose takes us away from the text's intended meaning.

6. For example, Joshua 1–12 depicts the Israelites' utter conquest of the promised land and total elimination or incorporation of the Canaanites. Yet the beginning of the Bible's very next book, Judges 1, describes a situation where Israelites are only one group, with limited areas of control, among several very much alive-and-well, competing, independent, indigenous groups of undestroyed Canaanites whom Joshua said were wiped out. Certainly, the redactors who placed Joshua and Judges together in the canon would have noticed the glaring historical contradictions between them! Unless, perhaps, they implicitly understood the narrative genre conventions of their day better than we do, recognized legitimate hyperbole when they saw it, and detected no discrepancies to worry about.

If hyperbole seems to us disingenuous or bad historical writing, we should realize that this does not mean the Bible is either of these things. Instead, we should check our own presentism in anachronistically projecting our own era's narrative conventions and expectations back in time onto people who did not use them. Reading the Bible is like going to a foreign country with a vastly different language and culture. We should always remember that it is we who are the visitors bringing strange conceptual baggage along with us. To understand the Bible as it was originally intended, we need read it through ancient eyes and try our best to leave the distorting lenses of our modern science-informed notions stowed away in our pocket, not because these ideas are wrong, but because they are alien to how the ancients wrote and hinder rather than help us understand the Bible.

Today's Bible readers miss the text's plain meanings about the Creation and the Flood when we read through the eyes of our modern cosmological conceptions and recent literary conventions. Walton's point is *not* that the literal readings above can be made to resonate with natural history (this is an effort totally beside the point) but that these understandings are what the narrative actually says and are thus where we need to start. The perceived need for Bible narratives to harmonize with scientific conceptions is *itself* a recent extrabiblical conceit not required anywhere in the Bible. In light of the Bible's most likely earliest plain meanings, virtually nobody today, except perhaps flat-earthers, seems nearly as literalist as they may want to imagine themselves to be.

Temple and Cosmos

If the Genesis Creation accounts⁷ are not meant to be always-and-forever guides to cosmology, what are they then? Intriguingly for Latter-day Saints, Walton sees them as transcriptions or reworkings of orally transmitted dramatic presentations that, in earlier versions, would have been performed by people with speaking parts, with audience participants invited to see themselves as Adam and Eve.⁸ The whole point of this practice was not to provide a science-conforming account of the earth

7. Genesis 8's postdiluvian narrative is also a Creation account in showing a new creation of the world after the total destruction of the world created in Genesis 1–2. It too starts with God's wind blowing back the water and creating barriers to the influx of the all-surrounding deep.

8. This oral performance-centered grounding for scripture both before and well into the era of the received written text of Genesis 1–2 would also apply to much of the Old

and cosmos's material emergence but to remind people of what God had done for them and of covenants they had made with him. What God did was establish and consecrate the whole earth as a temple in which he could reside and upon which humans could do the work he set out for them. Temples built by humans would be representations and reminders in miniature of this overarching cosmic conception of the whole world as a temple.

(At this point, it should probably be stressed again that Walton is not a Latter-day Saint and does not mention, or likely does not have much particular interest in, our temples and practices. He is merely gathering up and reporting for a mostly Protestant audience what the long-accumulated findings of secular ancient Near Eastern scholarship have revealed.)

Walton uses the analogy of a company to help demonstrate why Genesis more likely recounts the *functional* rather than the *material* creation of the earth.⁹ Like a temple, a company—a restaurant, for instance—really only comes into existence when it is dedicated as such, is staffed with cooks, waiters, and hosts—each fulfilling their particular roles—and is frequented by paying customers. Merely constructing a building does not a restaurant make. If a restaurant relocates to another building, we routinely regard it as the same restaurant. But if one establishment shuts down, and another opens in the same building, we do not see it as the same restaurant. The restaurant is the *functions* of the processes operating in the building, not the *material* edifice. So a restaurant's creation story is unlikely to be primarily about erecting a building to house it. Instead, it might recount the owner establishing a business model and corporate vision statement, deciding what food to serve and how to prepare it, and training and directing staff in setting up for the grand opening and operational kickoff—in other words, its actual creation story.

As has often been rightly said, Genesis was never intended as a science textbook. It was intended to tell the story of God setting up the *functions* the world would serve. Walton believes this absolutely and literally happened, perhaps even in six actual days. But he also wants us to know that God had Bible writers tell this story using a setting composed

and New Testaments. See John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority* (InterVarsity Press, 2013).

9. John H. Walton, "Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order Out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*," *Calvin Theological Journal* 43 (2008): 61–63.

of commonsense understandings familiar to people at the time. This in no way diminishes the Genesis Creation narratives. Rather, hereby they enjoy full reign to show forth their wonderous grandeur on their own terms—magisterial, timeless, eternal, unbehoden, and freed from improper expectation to harmonize with ever-changing scientific conceptions, however increasingly accurate these may be.

This being the case, Walton has little use for the few “resonances” some readers think they have discovered between natural history and Genesis, notably that the animals appear in roughly the same order—but not over the same time span—in Genesis 1:20–26 as they do according to the geologically stratified fossil record. Latter-day Saints might appreciate that Walton would also brush aside any supposed similarity between the ostensibly *ex nihilo* creation described in Genesis 1:1 and the Big Bang—the universe-creating “something-from-virtually-nothing” event whose after-effects have been observed by astronomers. Walton sees these as meaningless pseudoparallels, a few of which should be expected to emerge by random chance when comparing any two datasets as vast as the Bible text and the accumulated scientific findings on natural history. Because science developed many hundreds of years after the Bible took its final shape, it is unlikely that Bible authors’ original intentions included harmonizing their writings with science.

Furthermore, while orthodox Christian theology might hold to *ex nihilo* creation, the Bible text itself is, at best, an unsure source for this belief. The narrative order of Genesis suggests that the formless earth, “darkness,” and “the face of the deep” all existed before God’s spirit hovered over “the waters,” and God began creating by famously saying, “Let there be light” (Gen. 1:1–3). Scholars have long regarded the King James rendering of the Bible’s opening line, “In the beginning God created,” as a theologically motivated choice from among several plausible translations. Another valid wording is the Common English Bible’s “When God began to create,” which conveys a much less *ex nihilo* vibe.

Presumably, God might have chosen to reveal to Bible writers an account of material creation that corresponded to natural history at some point in our developing scientific understanding of it. However, this would have been incomprehensible and would have seemed preposterous to ancients and to most of humanity for generations. It then would have quickly become outdated as science progressed. What use would this really be in the more important task of impressing on us our need to repent and align ourselves with God and his plan for this world that he set up for this very purpose (however it was that he did it)?

The Reception History of the Genesis Creation Accounts

A reader of Walton might complain, “Well, shouldn’t Genesis be an account of material creation, because it is obvious from the fact that we have read it as one for so long that we want it to be?” If followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have learned anything over the last few thousand years of worshipping him, it is that he does not always tell us everything we want to know, right when we want to know it. And it is usually not a good idea to “steady the ark” by conjuring up our own notions and treating them as doctrine in place of yet-to-be-revealed truth (D&C 85:8). His ways are not our own and are often inscrutable. So what if he chose not to give us an account of material creation? He instead gave us something far more valuable—an account of who we are, what creation is for, and how our relationship to him can be developed to bring about our eternal joy.

Instead of impiously inventing meanings his revelations did not intend, perhaps we should instead be more appreciative for what we have in the even more marvelous gift he did choose to give us. Considering other important Bible narratives and the genre conventions they employ, perhaps it should not surprise us that Genesis does not even seek to conform to how we currently understand history, geology, biology, and planetary science. Some of the most beloved and important narratives in the Bible have been almost universally understood by earliest recipients, as well as modern scholars and lay readers, to be nonhistorical. Think, for example, of Jesus’s parables.

Reading Walton’s books, one might wonder, “If his understandings are so straightforward and evidence-backed, why has nobody thought of them before now?” and “How did we get so far off track?” The Latter-day Saint ideas of apostasy and still-unfolding restorative revelation come to mind as possible explanations. Stephen Greenblatt’s *The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve* may also help fill in some of the picture.¹⁰ This book traces the reception history of the Eden story from its first appearance to the present—looking at the ebb and flow of the esteem in which it has been held and the various ways in which it has been interpreted.

We know very little about how the two creation narratives that currently comprise Genesis 1 and 2 came to be. Scholars’ best guess goes something like this: Almost certainly many different versions—orally

10. Stephen Greenblatt, *The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve: The Story That Created Us* (W. W. Norton, 2017).

recited, performed as dramatic presentations, and written—circulated before, and influenced the writing of, the Creation and Eden accounts as they appear in the Bible. Genesis 2 took its canonical form, more or less, somewhere around the time of the United Monarchy (traditionally 1047–930 BCE). Later, probably during the Babylonian captivity, redactors may have further modified it and also developed Genesis 1 as we now know it with its focus on priestly concerns. Redactors presumably placed both narratives together in early formulations of the Hebrew canon. The two Creation accounts have been side by side for so long that they have come to be seen as a single account. But from a literary perspective, they are clearly two distinct compositions emerging several hundred years apart.¹¹ (None of this is necessarily incompatible with the traditional view that Moses was the primary vector of early versions of what is now in the Pentateuch.)

Creation and Eden are barely referenced elsewhere in the Old Testament and did not seem to figure particularly prominently in ancient Israelites' religious consciousness. Rather, Hebrew scripture's literary structure makes Exodus its historical and narrative fulcrum. Everything before the Exodus serves to set the stage for it. Everything after the Exodus reminds readers of the Israelites' (oft-overlooked) need to remember it. Themes and phrases regarding their deliverance from Egypt reverberate throughout the New Testament as well. Jesus is described in familiar Passover terms as the sacrificial lamb of God, whose blood saves from the destroyer.

We have little evidence that the earliest Christians made Creation and Eden central to their religious practice either. Though if they were part of a secret tradition, we would likely not know much about this by definition. When the early Church fathers did broach the subject, a number of them saw the Bible's Creation account as a kind of philosophical puzzle, like an extended perplexing Zen koan (that is, a paradox), that told an unusual story that was *set* at the time of Creation but was probably not meant to literally be a historical explanation of how it happened.

11. In one of the Bible's most egregious examples of chapter breaks and versification being tone-deaf to clear narrative divisions marked by recognizable story-ending and story-opening formulaic phrases, the Bible's first presented Creation narrative begins with Genesis 1:1 but does not end until halfway through Genesis 2:4 with "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created." The second Creation narrative, composed earlier, begins in the second half of Genesis 2:4 with "in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens" and wraps up at the end of Genesis 2:25, which is the end of the chapter.

As Walton might suspect, first- and second-century Christians did not seem to turn to Eden for an explanation for humans' material creation. Instead, the Garden episode provided fodder for deep pondering on the nature of the human condition, good and evil, and our relationship to God—not too unlike how we still mull it over in Sunday School today.

Origen, for example, suspected that some story elements may have even been purposefully included to dissuade readers from overly literal readings that might distract from its true purpose.¹² "For who that has understanding will suppose that the first and second and third day existed without a sun and moon and stars and that the first day was, as it were, also without a sky? . . . I do not suppose that anyone doubts that these things figuratively indicate certain mysteries, the history having taken place in appearance and not literally."¹³

This early Christian tendency for figurative interpretation changed dramatically in the AD 400s under the powerful influence of St. Augustine. To him, a literal reading of Genesis 1–2 was absolutely essential. If you have ever heard, "No Adam? Then no Christ!" as an argument for why literalism is critical here, the original purveyor of this notion was Augustine. He, perhaps unwisely, hung the legitimacy of the whole Christian message on the peg of the literal historicity of Genesis. If the peg doesn't hold fast, you might as well abandon the whole thing. Sadly, many people throughout the centuries, given only these two options, have done just that—abandoned the whole thing.

Augustine was centrally responsible for the orthodox Christian notions of creation *ex nihilo* and the Fall being an act of the most depraved disobedience—a calamitous disaster for all of humanity that broke completely from what God desired. Augustine's conception of the Fall as unfortunate was a primary influence on the Reformation luminary John Calvin, who promoted the idea of humankind's utterly depraved inability to choose the right, as well as the related predestinationist doctrine of a sovereign God's irresistible fiat election of everyone

12. Latter-day Saints may know and appreciate Origen as the early Church father who taught the premortal existence of all human souls, not only Jesus's. Other Christians remember him for the same reason. And for this, the agents of orthodox authority consolidation deemed him a heretic, despite once greatly valuing him. The first of fifteen "Anathemas against Origen" calls him out for asserting "the fabulous pre-existence of souls." Philip Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ser. 2, vol. 14 (Hendrickson Publishing, 1996), 318.

13. Origen, *The Fundamental Doctrines* 4:1:16 (AD 225).

to either salvation or the eternal torment of damnation. Thankfully, the Restoration's revealed doctrines of individual moral agency, vicarious work for the dead, and a *fortunate* Fall as an essential part of our loving God's plan all sweep aside such horrific philosophies. With no revealed timeframe, one wonders when the Great Apostasy began exactly. Was it before or after the early nonliteralist Church fathers in AD 100–300? Augustine, in the 400s, seems almost certainly to have done his writing well into the Great Apostasy's onset. If not, it seems safe to point to him as a primary instigator. This fuller contextualization of Augustine's theological legacy might be important for us Restorationists to keep in mind when deciding how much credence to give to his absolutist insistence that accepting or rejecting his own personal interpretation of the Creation and Fall present a "high-stakes" "make-or-break" proposition for the whole of the Christian gospel.

How Does the Bible Present Adam and Eve, Our First Parents?

Augustine's problematic promulgations notwithstanding, do not misread Walton as claiming that a nonhistorical read of Eden means that Adam and Eve were fictional characters. Perhaps a better way to describe his position is that, following common contemporaneous literary conventions, Genesis 1–2 cast these once actually living people in a mostly nonhistorical narrative context in order to serve a more important purpose than merely recounting how things happened. This might also be a wise approach to a number of famous figures sometimes dismissed as fictive figments. Ancient stories often use literary conventions unfamiliar to us. Or they answer questions and follow narrative presentation devices completely unrelated to modern historians' and science writers' preferred practices. But this does not necessarily mean that the characters in such stories never existed. This mistake has been repeatedly made in the past with figures as diverse as King David, King Arthur, and Leif Erikson. They all have been dismissed as fictional, only to have archaeological evidence emerge to shift their possibility of historicity in scholars' eyes from "hardly likely" to "quite plausible."

Personally, I would be dismayed if anyone used my own work on the orally transmitted anecdotes surrounding J. Golden Kimball as evidence that he never existed.¹⁴ This story cycle is frequently revealing of

14. Eric A. Eliason, *The J. Golden Kimball Stories* (University of Illinois Press, 2007).

human nature, often morally instructive, but also floridly imaginative and sometimes self-aware of its own fictionality. Significantly, despite no sane person doubting that “Uncle Golden” once lived, the oral narrative cycle about him bears little resemblance at all to his historically documented life and sermons.

As with interpretations of the Creation and the Flood that fail to start with Bible authors’ most likely original intended meanings, Walton suggests that traditional Eden interpretations assuming Adam and Eve to be the sole biological progenitors of the whole human species who stood alone as the first and only two humans on earth at the time may also be more recent inventions than we suppose. This notion, while dear to Creationists, is not explicitly stated anywhere in the Bible. (Hence, by their own preferred hermeneutic, it has no sound justification.) This notion also creates the obvious but totally unnecessary and disturbing question of “With whom did Adam and Eve’s children have children, exactly?” Historically, this has often been answered in the only—and supremely creepy—way possible, *if* one assumes Adam and Eve were the only living people at the time. Neatly dispelling this issue entirely, Walton proposes that Adam and Eve were intended to represent the earliest ancestors of the Hebrews with whom God made covenants. Hence, indeed, they are the sole apex progenitors of the *spiritual* family of God. (Walton’s contention is interesting to contemplate in the light of Restoration understandings of Adam and Eve’s pinnacle place in our theologies of sealing and adoption.)

However, the Genesis text is silent about any other possible ancestors for biblically unmentioned peoples who may have existed before or alongside Adam and Eve. A main theme throughout Hebrew scripture is that just because a covenant people should not intermarry with non-covenant peoples, doesn’t mean that they don’t—or that noncovenant people cannot be integrated into the covenant family, like Ruth or Rahab the Harlot.¹⁵ This would have been good news for any of Adam and Eve’s children who might have wanted to marry someone other than a sibling! Just as the Book of Mormon’s silence about other possible Native American ancestors (in addition to Lehi’s group and the Mulekites) has

15. Rahab, the “innkeeper” of Jericho, is not the same figure as Rahab, or Leviathan, the great sea monster. Though, as is often the case in the Bible, similar names were likely to have been thought to have some connection, perhaps in indicating an association with Egypt.

been increasingly seen as *not* ruling out the possibility of their existence, perhaps “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence” in the Bible’s case either.

An even more important issue here is to understand that Adam and Eve’s primary narrative function likely had little to do with providing a comprehensive genealogy for all of humanity—a genealogy historically accurate by modern reckonings that were unknown at the time. Rather, our first parents’ narrative function was to serve as proxies for each of us individually, and all of us collectively, as we enter a covenantal relationship with God. This role is evident in the wordplay of their names. “Adam” and “Eve” are unlikely to be the first names given them. According to a common ancient narrative convention, these were more likely new names given to them for their starring role in the Bible drama of God setting up the whole world as a cosmic temple. “Adam,” being a Hebrew word that can mean “red earth,” is likely a reference to the ground from which he was formed. “Adam” can also simply mean “man,” as in “humankind.” In another grammatical form, Adam can mean “the man.” This makes “the man, Adam” a curious repetition, perhaps for emphasis, that could mean “the man, the man.”

Eve’s name in Hebrew sounds similar to, and may actually have an etymological connection to, the root of the verb “to live.” By semantic extension, this makes her the “mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20), reinforces her identification with this role, and highlights our own situation as connected to her as part of “all living” through being her progeny. Here again, the importance of reading through the lens of prescientific mindsets, as well as biblical Hebrew’s literary conventions, is key in unlocking scripture’s earliest meanings. For ancients, such reflective riffing on words’ sonic similarities was *not* an example of groan-inducing punning, as our age might regard it. Rather, to ancients, the presence of such onomastic sound-parallelisms served as flag-waving indicators of auspiciousness. According to ancient conventional wisdom, there are no mere coincidences when words sound similar to each other in a story—*especially* with names. Such wordplay tells us, “Pay attention reader! See? God’s hand is at work here.”

According to Walton, the Eden narrative’s main purpose was *not*, and could not have been, to provide a prosaic account of human origins that we must accept over biological evolution. Actually, its purpose was to present our first covenanting foreparents as models for us, who demonstrate how we can respond to the world around us and to our

own weaknesses by turning to a loving God who uses our first parents' story as a vehicle to extend covenants that allow us to return to his good graces. I imagine that the Lord could have chosen among many historical backdrops to do this. The received text's Eden setting seems not only just as good, but likely far more lush and evocative than many other possible options.

What's in All This for Latter-day Saints?

If this cursory examination of a few John H. Walton books has sparked your curiosity, rejoice, there are more! You might also find engaging the following titles in his "Lost World of . . ." series, which also take on topics often difficult for us post-Enlightenment moderns to make sense of: *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority*; *The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest: Covenant, Retribution, and the Fate of the Canaanites*; and *The Lost World of the Torah: Law as Covenant and Wisdom in Ancient Context*.

These titles attest that the series's main premise is that many scriptural truths—perhaps one might even say “plain and precious” truths (1 Ne. 13:26–40)—have been lost or crusted over with understandings not from revelation itself but from somewhere else. “The philosophies of men” maybe? If this series is indeed onto something, their conservative Protestant authors—who might well be surprised at who some of their fans are—could well be pointing us to information relevant to Latter-day Saint edification. Relevant, that is, if we follow Joseph Smith's dictum: “One of the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism is to receive truth, let it come from whence it may.”¹⁶

In the end, as fruitful and legitimate as Walton's hermeneutic might be, the scrupulous search for most likely earliest meanings is not the only, or even most important, way to read scripture. The Church teaches that the most significant benefits we can gain from it are the personal revelations of life, direction that only the Spirit can reveal as we read. Scholarship's best guesses about earliest meanings may be enlightening but are not required. They are no substitute for direct prompting by the Holy Ghost. As Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught, “A specific verse of scripture that

16. “History, 1838–1856, Volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844],” 1666, The Joseph Smith Papers, Church Historian's Press, accessed March 22, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/36>.

was spoken for quite a different purpose in an entirely different age will, under the interpretive influence of the Holy Ghost, give us a very personal message adapted to our personal needs today.”¹⁷ Perhaps for some of us, on occasion, that need is to be able to sort out in our own minds a plausible way to remain committed to accepting truths “from whence” they may come as revealed by science and also by the Bible.

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17. Dallin H. Oaks, “Studying the Scriptures,” devotional address, March 14, 1986, BYU–Hawaii, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

Joseph Smith: The Rise and Fall of An American Prophet
By John G. Turner

Yale University Press, 2025

Reviewed by Steven C. Harper

I am an admirer of John Turner—the family man, the disciple of Jesus Christ, and the historian. He does things well. Given his previous books, I expected his biography of Joseph Smith to be well researched and written. It exceeded my expectations, especially in its literary qualities and its respect for Joseph Smith as a revelator. But it also left me with a couple of disappointments. I found it dismissive of the Book of Mormon and too careless in communicating clearly what is known and not known about Joseph Smith’s life, particularly his polygynous and polyandrous relationships.

The book begins with Turner’s provocative assessment of Joseph Smith: “I wouldn’t trust him with my money, my wife, or my daughter” (2). For thirty years I’ve been studying Joseph Smith and the people who chose to trust him with their lives and their fortunes. Reading *Rise and Fall* with all that in mind proved to be intellectually and spiritually stimulating. It stretched me beyond the usual exercise of reading biography because every page begs the question of Joseph Smith’s trustworthiness. This review is focused on the two best aspects of the book (in my judgment) and the two worst, followed by implications I see in the lives of people who knew Joseph Smith and decided to trust him.

Turner’s biography is very well written. The composition and style are lovely, of good report, and praiseworthy. Chapters were carefully constructed. Paragraphs are precise. The transition sentences are especially good. And the pacing of the book is near perfect. Its literary grace belies the massive amount of hard historical work that informs it. Fawn

Brodie's and Richard Bushman's biographies of Joseph are stylistically good.¹ Turner's is better.

Turner's biography will replace Brodie's as the interpretation of Joseph Smith favored by people who would not trust him with their money or their relatives. But Richard Bushman's biography of Joseph Smith is more careful and balanced. It sacrifices the pacing at which Turner excels, but at 376 pages of text, *Rise and Fall* sacrifices some of the even-handed analysis of the raw materials of history at which Bushman (561 pages of text) excels.

Turner overclaims sometimes, neglecting to differentiate between what is known and unknown. In other words, he presumes to know the unknown and tells it to readers matter-of-factly: "Emma never reflected at length on the unusual courtship or elopement" (35), and "Eliza never discussed her marriages in as much detail as her sister" (312).

This pattern is especially problematic when it comes to Joseph Smith's polygynous and polyandrous relationships, where Turner is aware that there are known unknowns and unknown unknowns. "Any historian writing about Joseph's polygamy has to admit a significant degree of *uncertainty*," he writes (255, emphasis added). Speaking of Emma and Joseph in 1842–1843, he adds, "No" (here it would be more precise to add the qualifier *known*) "sources document their private discussion of the subject during these months" (296). Turner accurately reports that "There is no record of how Joseph introduced the doctrine to Emma" (310) and that "there is no way to know" (316) whether Helen Kimball's relationship with Joseph included sex.

He is right about all of that. What Emma and Joseph Smith knew and said to each other on this subject and others throughout their marriage is almost all unknown. Yet Turner presumes to know that "Joseph *certainly* did not broach the subject with Emma" (255, emphatic adverb is original; emphasis added). Turner's tendency to state the unknown as fact reflects a certainty heuristic, where confidence is mistaken for accuracy—a cognitive bias described by psychologist Daniel Kahneman.² That kind of overclaiming is common in historical writing, but it is not history. Much better is the modesty Turner exhibits when he does

1. Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd ed., rev. (Alfred A. Knopf, 1971); Richard Lyman Bushman, with Jed Woodworth, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

2. Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 310–16.

not presume a complete or certain answer to, “What, if anything, did she know about her husband’s polygamy” as of April 1842? (276).

Turner interprets Joseph Smith’s relationship with Fanny Alger as an adulterous “dalliance” (255). He rejects sources that say it was a sealing in favor of Oliver Cowdery’s reference to it as a “filthy affair” (187–88). Unlike Bushman, Turner does not tell the whole story of the exchange between Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith over the adultery accusation, which ended with Joseph denying he was guilty of adultery and Cowdery conceding that point.³ Turner notes that as early as the 1830 Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith was thinking about polygynous relationships in ancient Israel, condemning adultery while leaving room for divine sanction, but concludes that Joseph only claimed divine sanction to justify his later polyandrous and polygynous relationships.

Before I read Turner’s biography, I expected that he would qualify Joseph Smith’s revelations. It would have been accurate and understandable for him to say, for instance, that Joseph Smith *said* that he and Oliver Cowdery experienced a series of visions together, of Jesus, then Moses, Elias, and Elijah. But Turner follows Bushman’s way of relating “events as the participants themselves experienced them.”⁴ For example, Turner writes, “They saw Jesus Christ standing atop the pulpit in front of them,” and “the Savior told the two men that they should rejoice,” and “Joseph and Oliver then saw Moses, Elias, and Elijah” (183). Bushman explained that “insofar as the revelations were a reality to them, I have treated them as real in this narrative,”⁵ and generally speaking, Turner does too.

The way Turner presents the Book of Mormon translation process is the exception to this rule. Turner rejects the evidence left by those who said Joseph translated the Book of Mormon without the use of books or manuscripts. “Joseph consulted the King James Bible during the translation,” Turner asserts. All the eyewitnesses of translation ascribed the phenomenon to revelation, whereas people who did not watch Joseph Smith translate concluded that “plagiarism from the Old and New Testaments” was the only possible option (67). Turner favors the interpretation of those who did not witness the translation.

3. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 323–27.

4. Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (University of Illinois Press, 1984), 3.

5. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings*, 3.

He interprets the evidence to mean “that Joseph did not have golden plates” (40). Turner grants that the people closest to Joseph believed he had plates but says that because “he did not show his family and friends the plates, there aren’t witnesses in the ordinary sense of the term” (40). Knowing that Turner knows the historical record well, I initially thought he meant that as of 1827, Joseph had not shown the plates to anyone. Page 39 reads, “Other men stated that they experienced visions of the plates, but Joseph never let anyone examine them in an ordinary way.” I assumed that the *never* in that sentence was an overclaim that meant *Joseph had not yet let anyone examine them*, and that in a subsequent chapter, in chronological order, Turner would tell me about the Book of Mormon witnesses, eight of whom said Joseph put the plates into their hands to heft. But I was misreading and misunderstanding.

Turner meant that Joseph never showed anyone the plates—never ever. He simply dismisses the historical record related to the eight witnesses with the word *ordinary*. All of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon plates only saw them in extraordinary ways, so not really. Turner shores up that interpretation by adding that Joseph was known to be playful and wanted to make good on his reputation as a treasure seer. He was, therefore, inclined to deceive and capable of convincing friends and relatives that they hefted ancient gold plates when, in fact, they did not (40).

That reading of the evidence left by eyewitnesses of the translation process, and by Book of Mormon witnesses, and by the people who witnessed them bearing witness to the Book of Mormon, does not comport with what they thought they experienced.⁶ In response to her father’s criticism of the Book of Mormon, Rebecca Swain Williams wrote him a letter that countered what she regarded as his misinformation. “I have heard the same storry from several of the family and from the three witnesses themselves. I heard them declair in publeck meeting that they saw an Holly Angel come down from heaven and brought the plaits and

6. See John W. Welch, “The Miraculous Timing of the Translation of the Book of Mormon,” in John W. Welch, ed., *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, 2nd ed. (Brigham Young University Press; Deseret Book, 2017), 79–125; John W. Welch, “[Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon: ‘Days \[and Hours\] Never to Be Forgotten’](#),” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2018): 10–50; Steven C. Harper, “The Eleven Witnesses,” *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Andrew H. Hedges, John Hilton III, and Kerry M. Hull (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Deseret Book, 2015), 117–32.

laid them before their eyes and told them that those was the plaits that Joseph Smith was translation the Book of Mormon from[.] they are men of good character.”⁷ The body of evidence Rebecca’s letter exemplifies defies a facile distinction between ordinary and extraordinary.

In this evidence, moreover, women including Rebecca, Ann Marsh Abbot, Sally Parker, and others decide for themselves whether they will trust Joseph Smith.⁸ In Sally’s case, one of the evidences on which she based her faith in the Book of Mormon came from hearing Hyrum Smith, one of the eight witnesses, testify that “he had seen the plates with his eyes and handled them with his hands.”⁹

In addition, William McLellin wrote a manuscript about his personal experiences with the three and eight witnesses of the Book of Mormon. In it he recounted the ways they affirmed their experiences to him in the crucible of Missouri mob violence in 1833. “What will I do,” he asked, “with a such a cloud of faithful witnesses, bearing such a rational and yet solemn testimony?”¹⁰ Turner’s analysis in *Rise and Fall* does not adequately answer that question.

There is evidence for ancient Israelites and a historical Jesus, Turner argues, but no evidence for a historical Lehi or ancient American Book of Mormon sites. Granted, but that clouds the issue. Ancient Israelites and a historical Jesus are ordinary. But the Bible’s claims that God inscribed stone tablets with his finger and sent his divine Son to bring eternal life are extraordinary indeed. There is more historical evidence for Book of Mormon plates than for tablets inscribed with the ten commandments. And not a shred of ordinary evidence exists for a virgin-born and resurrected Son of God. Here is the point, paraphrased using the words Turner used to dismiss the Book of Mormon witnesses: *People stated that they experienced the risen Savior, but Jesus never let anyone handle his resurrected body in an ordinary way.*

7. Rebecca Swain Williams to Isaac Swain, received June 12, 1834, image 3, typescript, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/cde999a8-d870-4157-80bf-d5cfe57d5e32/0/2>.

8. Janiece L. Johnson, “*The Scriptures Is a Fulfilling: Sally Parker’s Weave*,” *BYU Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005): 110–22. Janiece L. Johnson, “*Give It All Up and Follow Your Lord: Mormon Female Religiosity, 1831–1843*” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 2001; *BYU Studies*, 2008).

9. Janiece L. Johnson, “*Scriptures Is a Fulfilling*,” 116.

10. Mitchell K. Schaefer, “*The Testimony of Men: William E. McLellin and the Book of Mormon Witnesses*,” *BYU Studies* 50, no. 1 (2011): 99–110.

So what Turner is rejecting, really, is “the disintegration of sacred distance” Joseph Smith effected.¹¹ This rejection, moreover, seems rooted not in the evidence itself but in what Turner is willing to consider as possible. It seems unlikely, in other words, that his conclusion would change if more letters from Rebecca Swain Williams and Sally Parker, or more manuscripts by William McLellin, were discovered tomorrow, all affirming what they and others are already well documented to have said and believed: that Joseph Smith showed multiple witnesses actual golden plates in an *ordinary* way. Nor would it likely change any committed Christian’s faith if one hundred out of one hundred historians surveyed only accepted the historical Jesus, not the Son of God. It is not seeric objects, angels, or visions *per se* that Turner finds unbelievable. It is “seeing visions in the age of railways.”¹² *Rise and Fall’s* arbitrary use of *ordinary* and *extraordinary* keeps the sacred past intact while rejecting Joseph Smith’s disruption of it.

Turner also cites DNA studies, anachronisms, and lack of archaeological evidence to mean that the Book of Mormon is fiction, and “not good fiction” at that, then citing Mark Twain’s funny but dismissive quips (67). “The simplest conclusion,” Turner writes, “is that Joseph Smith authored the Book of Mormon” (68). My critique here is not that Turner doesn’t come to the same conclusion I do about Book of Mormon authorship. The critique is that regardless of who wrote it, twenty-four-year-old Joseph Smith gave the world a book that Turner does not adequately explain or appreciate, not even in superlative but ultimately empty explanations, including “an incredibly unlikely achievement,” “a stunning display of American audacity,” “chutzpah,” and respectable “native genius” (68).

To be sure, Turner is not as dismissive as Alexander Campbell, whom he quotes describing Joseph “as ignorant and as impudent a knave as ever wrote a book” (129). Contra Campbell, who dismissed the Book of Mormon as a hodgepodge of nineteenth-century American theological conversations, Turner grants that “some of the Book of Mormon’s most arresting ideas lay well beyond the intra-Protestant debates of the early nineteenth century” (69). Yet, like Campbell, Turner does not take the Book of Mormon—and therefore Joseph Smith—seriously enough to understand them on their own terms.

11. Terryl L. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2007), xv.

12. James Hannay and William Henry Wills, “In the Name of the Prophet—Smith!,” *Household Words: A Weekly Journal* 3, no. 69 (July 19, 1851): 385.

Campbell faulted the Book of Mormon for anachronistically featuring Christian Jews, believers that the Son of God would be born of a virgin named Mary in the future. The book's stated intent was lost on him. The Book of Mormon exists, its title page reads, to convince everyone that the God of Abraham is the babe of Bethlehem—that Jews were Christians who lost Christ, and that the Book of Mormon restores what was lost. Turner missed this too.

In summarizing the Book of Mormon, Turner writes, "Lehi has a vision of *Jesus Christ* descending from heaven. . . . Jesus gives Lehi a book . . ." (64, emphasis added), but, importantly, the Book of Mormon does not specify that Lehi saw Jesus, only a messianic figure. In the Book of Mormon, Lehi and his family only learn that Jesus is Christ as the book goes on. They recover by revelation the lost knowledge that the Messiah they anticipate is/will be a babe born of a virgin named Mary. First Nephi is expertly structured to feature this revelation at its heart and high point. "I looked and beheld the virgin again," Nephi declares at the midpoint of 1 Nephi, "bearing a child in her arms. And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father" (1 Ne. 11:20–21).

The entire Book of Mormon then features that revelation over and over and over. For example, King Benjamin prophesies, "he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary," adding that "he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come," and that he would be considered a mere mortal by those who "shall scourge him, and shall crucify him." King Benjamin adds, "And he shall rise the third day from the dead" (Mosiah 3:8–10). Abinadi, Alma, Samuel, and others all explicitly declare the same message. Then the risen Savior himself affirms, "I am Jesus Christ . . . I am the God of Israel" (3 Ne. 11:10, 14). The Book of Mormon concludes with Moroni's declaration that believers are sanctified "through the shedding of the blood of Christ" (Moro. 10:33).

The Book of Mormon and Alexander Campbell talked past each other. Campbell assumed that because everyone knows that people who lived before Jesus knew nothing of Jesus, the Book of Mormon is anachronistic. The Book of Mormon reads that because everyone (Campbell, for example) thinks they know that people who lived before Jesus knew nothing of Jesus, it has come forth to educate them otherwise. Jacob might wonder how Campbell completely missed his point. "For this intent have we written these things," Jacob writes, "that they may know that we knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we ourselves had a hope of his

glory, but also all the holy prophets which were before us. Behold, they worshiped the Father in his name" (Jacob 4:4–5).

Then the next chapter, Jacob 5, features an extended olive tree allegory, which Turner attributes to Joseph Smith, who did not borrow it from the Bible or any other known source, and who never cultivated, or even saw, an olive tree, and who, two years later, left us samples of his own composition in the broken sentences of his first journal entries and the rough prose of his earliest autobiography.¹³ In one way or another, the Book of Mormon came out of Joseph Smith's mouth and onto the page via Oliver Cowdery's pen and into print on Egbert Grandin's press before Joseph Smith was twenty-five years old. "Joseph deceived his family, friends, supporters, and readers," as Turner understatedly argues, or God worked through him (68). Either way, *Rise and Fall* does not adequately account for the intent, content, and design of the Book of Mormon, and therefore not for what the original edition called its author and proprietor.

It is understandable that John Turner and other people, then and now, do not trust Joseph Smith and that many people wonder how and why anyone trusted him then or trusts him now. So it is worthwhile to wonder how and why some good and faithful Christian souls trusted him, and not blindly. I mean the people who knew him, knew full well what Turner aptly calls his "flaws" (2), and chose to trust him with their money—Edward Partridge and Newel Whitney among them. These men were older and wiser than Joseph, more experienced money and property managers, as he and they well knew. At great cost, they followed Joseph's revelations that commanded them to disrupt their enterprises, move, and consecrate their lives and fortunes to Zion. So did the Knight and Whitmer families. So did Martin Harris and many others. What accounts for that?

The trust in Joseph Smith's revelations that required financial sacrifices was nothing compared to the July 1843 revelation on marriage. It makes the hard sayings of Jesus's bread of life discourse seem comparatively mild. Who can accept it? Well, the impressive list includes women and men who were not inclined to follow or submit to a sexual predator. First and foremost, it includes Emma Hale. It includes Lydia Partridge and her daughters Eliza and Emily. It includes Elizabeth Ann Whitney and her daughter, Sarah; Vilate Kimball, and her daughter Helen. It includes Zina Diantha

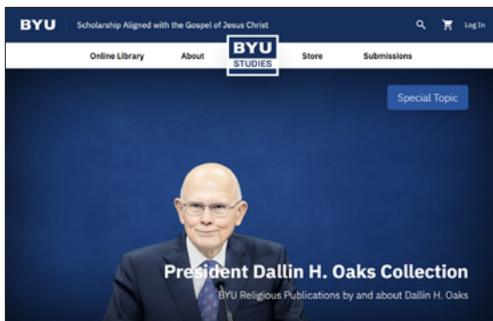
13. For examples, see "Journal, 1832–1834," in *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, ed. by Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2008), 9; "History, circa Summer 1832," *Histories, Volume 1: 1832–1844*, ed. Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian's Press, 2012), 10–13.

Huntington and Eliza Roxcy Snow. It includes Sarah Granger Kimball, who refused a polyandrous sealing to Joseph Smith without losing trust in him or his revelations. They knew him in ways a biographer cannot. Their choice to trust him matters when one weighs him in the balance.

Even so, one can understand the choice to not trust Joseph Smith. He empathized with it himself: “I dont blame you,” Joseph said just two months before he was murdered, “for not believi[n]g my histo[r]y had I not expeind [experienced] by it [I] could not believe it myself.”¹⁴ Turner’s *Rise and Fall* is a learned and welcome perspective and a remarkable contribution to what I hope will continue to be a growing number of Joseph Smith biographies. Turner’s will likely age well among them. It represents an immense amount of skillful historical and literary work that treats its subject seriously and rigorously. It adds to my admiration for its author.

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14. “Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Willard Richards,” in *Documents, Volume 14: 1 January–15 May 1844*, ed. Alex D. Smith, Adam H. Petty, Jessica M. Nelson, and Spencer W. McBride, Joseph Smith Papers (Church Historian’s Press, 2023), 336.



President Dallin H. Oaks is the eighteenth president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Oaks is a graduate of Brigham Young University (1954) and the University of Chicago Law School (1957). He was a law professor at the University of Chicago from 1957 to 1973, president of BYU from 1973 to 1980, and a justice of the Utah Supreme Court from 1980 until 1984, when he was called to the Apostleship. President Oaks, a native of Provo, Utah (born 12 August 1932), and his late wife, June Dixon Oaks, are the parents of six children. June passed away in 1998, and he later married Kristen M. McMain in 2000.

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