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**Abstract** Review of *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about the Book of Mormon* (1992), by John Ankerberg and John Weldon.

**John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism*. Eugene, \$13.95.**

### **Chattanooga Cheapshot, or The Gall of Bitterness**

Reviewed by Daniel C. Peterson

We are the hollow men  
We are the stuffed men  
Leaning together  
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!

—T.S. Eliot

I bought this book at a “Christian” outlet in Provo, along with Robert Morey’s dreadful little screed on *The Islamic Invasion*.<sup>1</sup> Both volumes had been shelved in the bookstore’s “Comparative Religions” section, and, as I paid for them, the young woman behind the counter smilingly congratulated me on my desire to “understand more about the cults.”

Since then, I have worried repeatedly about her compliment. It is both revealing and depressing to hear one of the world’s greatest religious traditions—Islam—casually dismissed as a “cult.”<sup>2</sup> But rather extensive experience over the past decade or so has taught me that precisely this is what passes for “comparative religion” among at least some fundamentalist Christians. How can one not be troubled by that fact? In view of the continued spread of highly conservative forms of Protestantism, in North and South America and elsewhere, one is surely entitled to worry about the bleak prospects such habits of speech and thought suggest for interreligious understanding

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Morey, *The Islamic Invasion: Confronting the World’s Fastest Growing Religion* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1992), 193–212, briefly examines abuse of the term *cult* by contemporary religious polemicists. I have tried to offer a sympathetic view of Islam in *Abraham Divided: An LDS Perspective on the Middle East* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1992).

in an ever more closely interrelated world civilization. With little ethnic and religious conflicts erupting around the globe, one hates to discover bigotry and intolerance flourishing in one's own backyard. I am afraid, though, that a look at *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism* does nothing to allay such concerns.

### Meet the Author(s)

Some readers will recognize John Ankerberg as the silver-haired "Phil Donahue" of "Christian" television, star and impresario of a Chattanooga-based talk show that he frequently devotes to exposés of any and all religious viewpoints with which he disagrees.<sup>3</sup> John Weldon is less well known, and his name appears on the cover in noticeably smaller print. He is currently employed as a "Senior Researcher" for Ankerberg's TV show, and one suspects that this book is substantially his, with the more marketable name of his boss appended for sales and ego purposes.<sup>4</sup> (On the copyright page of *Everything*, we are told that "This text constitutes an expanded revision of chapter 50 of Dr. Weldon's unpublished 8,000 page 'Encyclopedia of American Cults and Religions.'") At any rate, Weldon has more degrees than Ankerberg. He has a suspiciously large number of them, in fact—including two masters degrees, two doctorates, and some sort of religion degree from an unnamed law school

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<sup>3</sup> Actually, Ankerberg's tastes seem to run somewhat along the same lines as Geraldo Rivera's. (Fittingly, Geraldo himself is quoted on pages 417–19.) This book is positively obsessed with "the Mormons' literal sexual polytheism" (p. 369; cf. 84, 111, 134, 151). Its authors appear to be titillated by such topics as "the spirit children produced by the sexual intercourse of the male and female gods" of the Latter-day Saint "pantheon" (p. 407; cf. 116, 132, 143, 206–7, 219). "As in many primitive and pagan religions," they tell their readers, "Mormonism teaches that the gods are sexually active" (p. 111). "Perhaps one reason why Mormon history is disgraced with sexually-related sins," the book asserts, without demonstrating such disgrace, "is because of the sexual emphasis and practices of the gods it worships" (p. 116; cf. 134, 217–18).

<sup>4</sup> For Weldon's current employment, see the brief biographical sketch that accompanies his article "Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism: Mystical Materialism for the Masses," *Christian Research Journal* 15/2 (Fall 1992): 8–13. Page three of the *Christian Research Journal*, published by the late "Dr." Walter Martin's "Christian Research Institute," lists Weldon as a "contributing editor."



(p. 14).<sup>5</sup> However, a search of the *Comprehensive Dissertation Index* in the Brigham Young University library turned up no mention of Weldon, which appears to indicate that his doctorates were earned at the kind of institution that either (a) does not require a dissertation or (b) is not represented in the *Comprehensive Dissertation Index*. (Or, alternatively, that his dissertations were submitted prior to 1861.)<sup>6</sup> And Weldon has been as prolific as a writer as he has been in collecting degrees. From 1975 to 1984, he either wrote or cowrote ten books—most of them dealing with occultism and the demonic—besides contributing to various magazines and to a guide to “cults.”<sup>7</sup> In 1986, he published *Psychic Forces and Occult Shock*.<sup>8</sup> And,

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5 An entry on Weldon in Hal May, ed., *Contemporary Authors*, vol. 113 (Detroit: Gale Research, 1985), 509, says that he received his B.A. (with honors) from San Diego State, followed by an M.A. from the Pacific College of Graduate Studies in Melbourne, Australia. By 1987, he is identified inside his *New Age Medicine: A Christian Perspective on Holistic Health* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1987) as “John Weldon, M.A., M.Div.” Between 1987 and the publication of *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism* in 1992, Weldon has apparently earned two doctorates and a law degree. Pretty impressive. (“My desire is to pursue graduate studies in Christian evidences,” *Contemporary Authors* quotes him as saying circa 1985, “and to begin writing in this area.”)

6 Incidentally, a search for the late anti-Mormon luminary Walter Martin in the *Comprehensive Dissertation Index* failed to turn up any entries between the years 1861 and 1992. This is interesting in view of a small brochure that was recently sent to me by Ms. Clodette Woodhouse, a dedicated anti-Mormon located in Whittier, California. The pamphlet is entitled “Does Dr. Walter Martin Have a Genuine Earned Doctor’s Degree?” and is published by Martin’s own “Christian Research Institute.” It makes a rather passionate case against the assertion of Robert L. Brown and Rosemary Brown, *They Lie in Wait to Deceive*, vol. 3 (Mesa, AZ: Brownsorth, 1986), that Martin’s doctoral degree is suspect. “Dr. Martin completed all his graduate studies at New York University,” says the brochure, “and simply submitted his thesis at [California Western University or, alternatively, California Coast University].” But, to repeat, no such thesis or dissertation is listed with the *Comprehensive Dissertation Index*. Furthermore, the brochure runs aground on yet another point: Speaking of “facts which are not disputed concerning Walter Ralston Martin,” the brochure features the claim that “he is an ordained Baptist minister and a member of the Southern Baptist Convention.” However, on pp. 1–18 of their book the Browns dispute precisely those two “facts.”

7 May, *Contemporary Authors*, 113:509. Two of these ten books were eventually reprinted under different titles.



presumably, if his unpublished "Encyclopedia" really totals anything like 8,000 pages, the frenetic pace has continued. (What other books he may have published since 1986 I cannot say; the libraries to which I have access do not seem to assign a high priority to collecting his writing.)

As the mandate of this *Review* suggests, my comments here will concentrate on Ankerberg and Weldon's treatment of the Book of Mormon. I will dig an exploratory archaeological trench, as it were, that should be enough to allow readers to gauge their overall reliability. I will also, however, sneak glances in other irresistible directions.

The book makes striking claims on its own behalf. "*Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism*" is not what one would generally describe as a self-effacing title. It asserts its own objectivity, for example. More than once. "In this book," Ankerberg and Weldon write, "we have attempted to fairly and accurately describe the teachings and beliefs of the Mormon religion" (p. 16). And, indeed, their discussion of Latter-day Saint faith and practice is quite comprehensive. As the blurb on the back cover of the book says, it is "A One-Volume Library on Mormonism, From It's [*sic*] Early Schemes to It's [*sic*] Modern Deceptions." What a range! Who could ask for anything more? Eager-but-busy seekers of Truth will be pleased to know that the book is organized into such helpful chapters as "Does the Mormon Church Encourage Spiritism and Necromancy?" (pp. 241–53), "Mormon Distortions of History and Religion" (pp. 361–73), "Mormon Distortion of Biblical Authority" (pp. 375–88), "Mormon Distortion of Salvation" (pp. 389–404), "Mormon Distortion of Human Relationships: What Are the Terrible Fruits of Mormon Polygamy and Racism?" (pp. 405–27), and "Mormon Distortion of Trust" (pp. 429–43). Chapter appendices treat such questions as "Was the Early Mormon Church Unjustly Persecuted As It Claims—Or Did It Bring Suffering Upon Itself?" (pp. 42–46; cf. 353)<sup>9</sup> and

<sup>8</sup> So, at any rate, says one of the opening pages of *New Age Medicine*, the only John Weldon book among the three million volumes of the Brigham Young University library.

<sup>9</sup> Reading their discussion of the early Mormon persecutions, one is forcibly reminded of the phenomenon, common in rape cases, of "blaming the victim." One is also struck by the sources on which our two experts rely. These include such stars of the anti-Mormon circuit as Fanny Stenhouse, Bill Hickman, and, always and ever, Jerald and Sandra Tanner.

“Has There Been Satanic Infiltration of Mormonism?” (pp. 253–54). (Astute readers of this *Review* will already have guessed Ankerberg and Weldon’s answers to both of these questions.)

Very satisfied with their own performance, Ankerberg and Weldon imagine that they have “demonstrated” the Book of Mormon to be a nineteenth-century forgery (p. 292).<sup>10</sup> The conclusion, they say, is “unavoidable” (p. 299). Indeed, Mormonism itself has been definitively “disproven” (p. 341). And all of this has been accomplished through use of the most rigorous and objective methods and the most accurate research materials. How did the book get to be so, well, so remarkably *excellent*? Credit has to be given to John Ankerberg and John Weldon. They have demanded much of themselves. They have refused to be satisfied with easy put-downs or second-rate scholarship. “The only manner,” they say, “in which competing religious claims can be resolved is to (1) fairly state the claims, (2) adequately examine the evidence and (3) discover who is right” (p. 264).

It sounds great. But such pretensions, intoned by the likes of Ankerberg and Weldon, are utterly and absolutely bogus. They do *not* “fairly state” Latter-day Saint claims. They refuse to “adequately examine the evidence.” Thus, they are not even remotely qualified to “discover who is right.” Like Caesar’s Gaul, Ankerberg and Weldon’s gall is comprised of three parts: (1) Their book shows virtually no trace of any acquaintance with Latter-day Saint writing and betrays not the slightest evidence that they have ever, even once, tried to sympathize with, or to understand, the faith of those they have targeted for attack. (2) Their book slavishly repeats anything it can find in anti-Mormon writing, no matter how implausible or even downright stupid it may be, and positively rejoices in real, imagined, or manufactured Mormon iniquity (see 1 Corinthians 13:6). (3) It claims, nonetheless, to be an objective and exhaustive examination of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, of its history, and of its teachings.

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There is not a hint of acquaintance with serious contemporary historical scholarship on Mormonism. As we shall see, this is typical of the book throughout.

<sup>10</sup> Not given to nuances, they claim that the same definitive quietus has been given to the book of Abraham (pp. 314–15).



I will not hide my opinion: This is an ugly, incompetent, uncharitable, dishonest book, of which its authors and its publisher ought to be ashamed.

### Simple Errors in Fact

The problems start with Ankerberg and Weldon's failure to master even basic facts about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Errors and misinterpretations and highly questionable presuppositions pervade this book.

Careful readers of the Book of Mormon will be surprised, for instance, to learn that the Nephites were "Jewish" (p. 35; contrast Alma 10:3). And just where does Joseph Smith ever claim that the book of Abraham, like the Book of Mormon, was translated from "reformed Egyptian" (p. 315)? To sustain their charge that Joseph Smith was an immoral egomaniac (pp. 51–52), Ankerberg and Weldon cite Doctrine and Covenants 135:3—evidently unaware that this section was actually written by John Taylor, after Joseph's martyrdom.<sup>11</sup> Members of the Latter-day Saint Church, Ankerberg and Weldon falsely declare, are discouraged from reading the Bible (p. 378). On the other hand, our scholars claim, tithing is "mandatory" (pp. 28, 29). Furthermore, they report, "Mormon teaching [denies] God, Christ, salvation, the Bible, etc." (p. 368), and Mormonism rejects "the blood atonement of Christ" (p. 199). (This despite the fact that, every week, Latter-day Saints partake of the sacrament "in remembrance of the blood of [the] Son, which was shed for them" [Moroni 5:2; cf. D&C 20:79].)

Consider, too, the following sentence: "In ancient Corinth the pagans (e.g., the Marcionites) practiced baptism for the dead rituals and had other practices and beliefs similar to modern Mormonism" (p. 240; cf. 433). Clearly, Ankerberg and Weldon wish to discredit Mormonism by linking it with ancient heathens. (More on this below.) Just as clearly, they would like to

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<sup>11</sup> It is intriguing, furthermore, to learn that "no biblical scholar considers Mormonism to be a Christian religion" (p. 376; cf. 79). Ankerberg and Weldon cite no reference to the kind of comprehensive survey of world biblical scholars that would have to undergird so sweeping a claim. In any event, however, I can prove them wrong, since I know Latter-day Saint biblical scholars who most definitely think themselves Christian. And I am highly confident that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of other biblical scholars who either positively believe Mormons to be Christian or have never given the question a moment's thought.



evade the clear implication of 1 Corinthians 15:29, that first-century *Christians* were performing vicarious baptisms at Corinth. In their attempted evasion, however, they have committed at least three errors: (1) The first-century people performing vicarious baptisms in Corinth were not Marcionites. Marcion, the eponymous founder of the Marcionites, was born in Asia Minor, spent his career in Rome, and died well past the middle of the *second* century. (2) The Marcionites were *not* pagans. Rather, they were “heretical” early Christians. And (3) they were not the only early Christians to practice baptism for the dead.<sup>12</sup>

Their eagerness to make the Book of Mormon seem absurd leads Ankerberg and Weldon into embarrassing error, as well: “One passage, for example, has it that huge numbers of attacking snakes ‘herded’ people and their flocks and built ‘hedged’ around them to prevent escape” (p. 302). Ankerberg and Weldon’s reference is to Ether 9:31–33, which reads, in full, as follows:

And there came forth poisonous serpents also upon the face of the land, and did poison many people. And it came to pass that their flocks began to flee before the poisonous serpents, towards the land southward, which was called by the Nephites Zarahemla. And it came to pass that there were many of them which did perish by the way; nevertheless, there were some which fled into the land southward. And it came to pass that the Lord did cause the serpents that they should pursue them no more, but that they should hedge up the way that the people could not pass, that whoso should attempt to pass might fall by the poisonous serpents.

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<sup>12</sup> See F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 870–71 (“Marcion is discussed in all histories of early Christian doctrine”); Everett Ferguson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (New York and London: Garland, 1990), 568–69. Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, treats the semantic sleight-of-hand commonly employed by critics of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Specific discussions of the Marcionites and of baptism for the dead, with many references, occur on pp. 53 and 108–10, respectively. See also Hugh Nibley, “Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times,” in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, vol. 4 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1987), 100–167.

There is no mention in these verses of anything so ridiculous as snakes "herding" people. Indeed, the verb "to herd" never occurs anywhere in the Book of Mormon. And where is there any claim that snakes built "hedges"? Ankerberg and Weldon have fundamentally misunderstood the text (if they read it at all). Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, perhaps our best source for the language of Joseph Smith and his contemporaries, knows the verb *to hedge* and includes among its meanings "to obstruct with a hedge, or to obstruct in any manner." Clearly, this latter is the meaning of the verb as it occurs in Ether 9:31–33. Ankerberg and Weldon should have known better, for the usage is typical of the King James Bible, as well. Hosea 2:6 records the Lord as threatening, "I will hedge up thy way with thorns." Job 3:23 asks, "Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?"<sup>13</sup> "He hath hedged me about," says Lamentations 3:7, "that I cannot get out." Do Ankerberg and Weldon imagine that God literally goes around constructing hedges about the wicked? Can they provide an example of this? And if they decline to read the Bible in so silly a way, why do they insist on misreading the Book of Mormon? Mark Twain, it is said, once offered some advice that might prove useful to Ankerberg and Weldon. "Get your facts first," he counseled, "and then you can distort them as much as you please."

Simple error, however, is not the only resource of which Ankerberg and Weldon avail themselves in their assault upon The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. One of their most useful weapons against Mormonism is the double standard. A clear instance of this can be found in their remarks on the place of Latter-day Saint women: "Unfortunately, as in Hinduism and Islam today, Mormon women are accorded a secondary status." This is a caricature of the Latter-day Saints, of course, and it is not altogether fair to Hinduism and Islam. Nevertheless, to support it, they then immediately cite what is meant to be an appalling passage from Brigham Young, to the effect that "the man is the head and God of the woman" (p. 113). They fail, however, to acknowledge such biblical passages as Ephesians 5:22–24, in which, as fundamentalists, they

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<sup>13</sup> The King James translation of Job 10:11 reads, "Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews." Cruden, on the other hand, renders the passage as "thou hast hedged me with bones and sinews."



indisputably believe, and which teach virtually the same thing that Brigham Young was saying, and in very similar language.

Another instance of the double standard occurs in Ankerberg and Weldon's self-congratulatory paean to born-again scriptural exegesis. Mormons, they say, read the Bible through the lens of Latter-day Saint presuppositions. Fundamentalists, on the other hand—perhaps unique among all human beings who have ever lived—come to the text with no presuppositions or assumptions of any kind. They “permit the Bible to speak for itself” (p. 376). And, of course, what the Bible says, unambiguously and beyond honest dispute, is “Protestant Fundamentalism.” But this is rubbish. It is true that the Latter-day Saints come to the biblical text with presuppositions and with concerns and interests that affect their reading of it. So do fundamentalists. So does everybody.<sup>14</sup> There are, however, two essential differences between Latter-day Saints and their fundamentalist detractors on this point: First, Latter-day Saints are aware that they have extrabiblical ideas, and fundamentalists, by and large, are not. Second, Latter-day Saints believe that the lens through which they read the Bible comes from divine revelation, while fundamentalists don't even pretend to anything more than a hodgepodge of inherited cultural norms and prejudices along with a substantial number of Hellenized theological speculations.

### We Don't Want to Know

At one point in this virtually interminable book, Ankerberg and Weldon set out to “evaluat[e] the quality of Mormon apologetics” (p. 361). But do they? One looks in vain for a consideration of the works of Orson and Parley Pratt or of John Taylor. B. H. Roberts wrote extensively in support of the claims of the Book of Mormon, and in defense of the *Mormon Doctrine of Deity*, but nothing of this was found worthy of inclusion in *Everything*. “Dr. Hugh Nibley is a prominent Brigham Young University professor,” Ankerberg and Weldon note. “Some Mormons consider him one of the greatest scholars in the church” (p. 273). Yet Ankerberg and Weldon have evidently looked at none of his writing. Without any exception that I can

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<sup>14</sup> For a critique of the fantasy of presuppositionless reading and scholarship, see David B. Honey and Daniel C. Peterson, “Advocacy and Inquiry in the Writing of Latter-day Saint History,” *BYU Studies* 31 (Spring 1991): 139–79.



discover, every single reference to Hugh Nibley in their hundreds of notes is drawn, not from his own works, but from second-hand citations gleaned from the writings of the Tanners or other anti-Mormons. In his own person, Professor Nibley is essentially invisible in this book; his arguments are never faced. Nonetheless, Ankerberg and Weldon confidently list Hugh Nibley, with Dewey Farnsworth and Milton Hunter, among the "zealous, but misinformed, amateur archaeologists who are careless or biased with their use of data in their defense of Mormonism" (p. 286).

John Welch, the founding president of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, shows up on only two occasions, on one of which he is used to confirm that irrationalism (i.e., an appeal to the confirming witness of the Holy Ghost) is the last resort of desperate Latter-day Saints (p. 273). On the other occasion, he serves merely to endorse B. H. Roberts (p. 127), who, in turn, is then rather underhandedly drafted as a witness against the very Church he loved and served so well. Likewise, the sophisticated statistical studies of John Hilton and the so-called "Berkeley group" go unnoticed.<sup>15</sup> Warren and Michaela Aston's fascinating Arabian explorations are unmentioned.<sup>16</sup> John Tvedtnes's impressive study of "King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles" and Stephen Ricks's important essay on "The Treaty/Covenant Pattern in King Benjamin's Address" and John Welch's interesting report on "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals" are, all three, absent.<sup>17</sup> H. Curtis Wright's discussion

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<sup>15</sup> See John L. Hilton, "Some Book of Mormon 'Wordprint' Measurements Using 'Wraparound' Block Counting," F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1988; John L. Hilton, "On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book of Mormon Authorship," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 89-108. For a brief and accessible account, see "Wordprints and the Book of Mormon," in John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1992), 221-26.

<sup>16</sup> See Warren P. and Michaela J. Aston, "The Place Which Was Called Nahom," F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1991, as well as their "And We Called the Place Bountiful," F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1991.

<sup>17</sup> John A. Tvedtnes, "King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles," in John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1990), 2:197-237; Stephen D. Ricks, "The Treaty/Covenant Pattern in King Benjamin's Address," *BYU Studies*

of "Ancient Burials of Metal Documents in Stone Boxes" receives no attention.<sup>18</sup> Blake Ostler's and John Welch's analyses of Lehi's prophetic call are apparently unknown to Ankerberg and Weldon, as is Paul Hoskisson's essay on textual evidences for the Book of Mormon.<sup>19</sup> Noel Reynolds's fine anthology of essays on *Book of Mormon Authorship* is left uncited, almost certainly because it was unread.<sup>20</sup> And the ever more productive Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (F.A.R.M.S.) is never confronted.<sup>21</sup> Other than a couple of passing references to "the Foundation for Ancient Research on [sic] Mormon Studies," Ankerberg and Weldon don't even seem to be aware that F.A.R.M.S. exists (p. 273; cf. 127).

Ankerberg and Weldon attempt to dismiss all Mormon scholarship as dilettantish and inept: "When Mormons claim there is archaeological verification for both the Book of Mormon and their religion, they are either uninformed or distorting the facts" (p. 290). Ankerberg and Weldon cite Henry Ropp's revelation that "not until 1938 did the first Mormon earn a doctorate in archaeology, and today only a few hold this degree" (p. 286). (Are we supposed to infer that, prior to 1938, doctorates in ar-

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24/2 (1984): 151-62; John W. Welch, "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals," F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1985.

<sup>18</sup> H. Curtis Wright, "Ancient Burials of Metal Documents in Stone Boxes," in Lundquist and Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also by Faith*, 2:273-334.

<sup>19</sup> Blake T. Ostler, "The Throne Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi," *BYU Studies* 26/4 (1982): 67-95; John W. Welch, "The Calling of a Prophet," in Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr., eds., *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988), 35-54; Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Textual Evidences for the Book of Mormon," in Nyman and Tate, *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi*, 283-95.

<sup>20</sup> Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1982).

<sup>21</sup> Two recent books summarize the past decade's research on the Book of Mormon—largely the work of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies—in particularly accessible fashion: John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1991); Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*. Very recently, F.A.R.M.S. has launched a *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, which promises to be a landmark in the history of scholarship on the Nephite record.



chaeology were common *outside* of Mormondom?) Then, on page 287, they attempt to portray a battle within the Church between a newer generation of genuine scholars, skeptical (as real scholars would necessarily be) of the Book of Mormon's claims, and naively amateurish believers. It is here that John Sorenson finally makes an appearance—not as one of the foremost students of the Book of Mormon in the Church, not as the sophisticated author of numerous important works, a former member of the board of directors of F.A.R.M.S., and a zealous advocate of the Book of Mormon, but as a critic of sloppy, amateur scholarship (which Ankerberg and Weldon falsely imply to be the sum total of Latter-day Saint work on the Book of Mormon). And again, typically, Ankerberg and Weldon do not quote Professor Sorenson directly, but only at second hand, from the Tanners.

So when it comes time to examine “the quality of Mormon apologetics,” Ankerberg and Weldon limit themselves to only four items: (1) the anonymous anthology *A Sure Foundation: Answers to Difficult Gospel Questions*, (2) Joseph Fielding Smith's multivolume series of *Answers to Gospel Questions*, (3) Arthur Wallace's *Can Mormonism Be Proved Experimentally?*, and (4) “a popular Mormon evangelistic tract titled, *The Challenge*” (p. 363). The first two items are collected reprints of brief magazine articles, and the fourth is a short pamphlet. Even before hurriedly glancing at the chosen specimens, though, Ankerberg and Weldon condemn them. “In many ways,” they announce,

even these volumes are not true apologetic works; they do not provide a defense of the truth of the Mormon religion. Mormonism has no facts to use in its defense, and hence what does not exist cannot be presented. What Mormon apologetic works do is to provide 1) false claims which lack support and 2) what can frequently only be described as carefully worded distortions—alleged “explanations” for the many logical, historical, biblical, and scientific problems raised by their scripture, theology and history. (p. 363)<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> This dismissive attitude is apparent, too, in their passing comments on Stephen E. Robinson's *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991). Although they never once deal with his arguments,



Given such an *a priori* attitude of total dismissal, and given so thinly veiled a charge of dishonesty, no Latter-day Saint argument can survive. Indeed, no Latter-day Saint argument even needs to be considered, for we know beforehand that it will be empty—just as certainly as medieval Aristotelians are said to have known that objects of unequal weight fall at different speeds. An actual test would be a waste of time. Thus, it is scarcely surprising that Ankerberg and Weldon dispose of their four “representative texts of Mormon apologists” (p. 363) in just slightly more than ten pages. With reference to Dr. Wallace’s book, for example, Ankerberg and Weldon explicitly “leave aside” his “many claims for the Book of Mormon (for example, the ‘staggering’ evidence from ancient history).” They simply look away. Instead, they devote their attention to “a few ‘staggering’ inaccuracies” (pp. 369–70) that remain, so far as I can see, eminently debatable and quite unstagging. Case closed. Characteristically, they simply cannot look seriously at Mormon arguments. Instead, they declare themselves the winners of a race from which competitors have effectively been banned.

Having dutifully offered a perfunctory nod in the direction of Latter-day Saint scholarship, Ankerberg and Weldon are now free to offer sweeping judgments. “Mormons may have their ‘scientific,’ ‘historical’ and ‘logical’ arguments for their beliefs,” they remark with almost unbearable smugness, “but so does the Flat Earth Society” (p. 373).<sup>23</sup> Our two scholars are qualified to

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Ankerberg and Weldon declare that, “in chapter 8,” they have “examined Dr. Robinson’s attempt to defend the claim that Mormonism is Christian.” Their “examination” consists of three brief and superficial paragraphs. On that basis, they announce that Professor Robinson’s “attempt to defend the claim that Mormonism is Christian” is, “at best,” “a poor case of wishful thinking” (p. 363). “It will be convincing only to those who are unfamiliar with how to spot logical fallacies and are ignorant of Mormon history/doctrine and biblical/historic/systematic theology” (p. 82). At the risk of seeming immodest, I think I can truthfully say that I am a living, breathing refutation of Ankerberg and Weldon on this point. A much more serious but nonetheless wholly ineffective attempt to refute Professor Robinson has recently appeared, written by a professor at conservative Denver Seminary. See Gordon R. Lewis, “A Summary Critique,” *Christian Research Journal* 15/2 (Fall 1992): 33–37.

<sup>23</sup> The arrogance of such language is especially evident when one considers the fact that Ankerberg and Weldon’s own logical skills appear to

make such a judgment because of their virtually unrivaled erudition. "We have studied close to one hundred different religions," they say, in a passage that tells us much about their approach to the faiths of other people.<sup>24</sup> "While the evidential base of all of them is weak or nonexistent, it remains true that few religions have such a substantial array of evidence against it [*sic*] as does Mormonism" (p. 262).

They may have read little or no Latter-day Saint writing, but they know their anti-Mormon canon intimately. And, while all Mormon scholars are midgets, every anti-Mormon pamphleteer is a giant of erudition and objectivity. It is the reader's privilege, for instance, to meet the eminent "Dr. Charles Crane, a college professor and expert on Mormon archaeology" (p. 263). We are not told in what college he is a professor, nor what subject he professes. Quite obviously, since he offers no argu-

be rather rudimentary. See, for example, their comments on JST John 1:1 and John 4:26, where failure explicitly to affirm a proposition is misread as a direct denial of that proposition (p. 385; cf. 110, on John 4:24). Compare, too, pages 85 and 211–12, where they misread their own quotations from Sterling McMurrin and the *Encyclopedia Britannica* [*sic*], converting assertions that Mormonism does not agree with mainstream Christian doctrines on several points into absolute denials that Latter-day Saints are Christians at all. On page 289, they read a statement from the National Geographic Society as "denying Mormon claims" when it only denies using the Book of Mormon as an archaeological guide. Their list of purported "Contradictions in Mormon Scripture and Theology" (pp. 327–40) reveals a very weak grasp of the logical concept of contradiction. So, likewise, does their discussion of Joseph Smith's First Vision: On pages 268–69, Ankerberg and Weldon make much of the fact that, in one account of the First Vision, there is no mention of the Father but only of the Son. This, they say, contradicts the more familiar version in which both the Father and the Son appear. But, by the same standard, the biographical information given about John Weldon on page 14, which mentions two doctorates, contradicts the information given on the back cover and at Weldon, "Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism," 13, where only *one* doctoral degree is mentioned. Weldon's doctorates, I presume, are at least as fictional as Joseph Smith's First Vision. With such logical rigor undergirding their method, it is hardly surprising that Ankerberg and Weldon see Mormon teaching riven with "terrific internal contradictions" (p. 355; cf. 341) that are largely invisible to the Latter-day Saints themselves.

<sup>24</sup> One has to admire their diligence: To have studied nearly a hundred religions with the rigor and intensity they have devoted to Mormonism would require the better part of a week.

ments, we are supposed to accept the statements of this venerable savant on the strength of his indisputable academic authority. Thus, with regard to the Book of Mormon: "Dr. Charles Crane, an expert on Mormon archaeology, confesses, 'I am led to believe from my research that this is not an actual story but is a fairy tale much like Alice in Wonderland'" (p. 284).<sup>25</sup>

A very strong statement, that. But who is Charles Crane, that we should bow before his opinion or regard it as any more authoritative than anybody else's? What kind of "research" has he performed? Is he an objective or trustworthy judge? Twenty minutes or so in a good library reveal that Charles Crane is a Protestant minister with lifelong interests in opposing Mormonism. There is, however, no sign of any particular expertise in archaeology. Reverend Crane was educated at the Northwest School of Religion in Portland, Oregon, and at Lincoln Christian Seminary in Lincoln, Illinois, and received a Doctor of Ministry degree from Luther Rice Seminary in Jacksonville, Florida. He is said to have converted his first Latter-day Saint at the age of fourteen, and, by 1977, claimed to have "taught and baptized over 200 Mormons." As of 1983, he was the author of three books: *The Bible and Mormon Scriptures Compared: or The Educational Process of Winning Mormons*, and *Do You Know What the Mormon Church Teaches?*, and *Mormon Missionaries in Flight*.<sup>26</sup> Manifestly,

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25 Folks are always breathlessly "confessing" one thing or another to Ankerberg and Weldon. (Remember, John Ankerberg is a television talk show host.) Dr. Stephen Robinson "confesses" (on p. 108) that Mormons believe in eternal progression. In 1877, say our two scholars with regard to the translation of the Book of Mormon, David Whitmer "confessed" to something that few Latter-day Saints would find either incriminating or embarrassing (p. 277). Later, on the same page, Emma Smith is also discovered to have "confessed" to something Ankerberg and Weldon think sinister. "One prominent Mormon confessed in 1875" that the Latter-day Saint concept of the next life is partially like and partially unlike that of the spiritualists (p. 238). In each instance, the verb "confessed" gives the subsequent statement, innocuous in itself, just the right savor to suit anti-Mormon purposes. (James E. Talmage "grudgingly concedes," on page 380, that the Bible is essentially authentic.) Sometimes, though, Latter-day Saints "confess" to things that Ankerberg and Weldon obligingly put in their mouths. Thus, Ezra Taft Benson "freely confesses to necromantic contacts" (p. 251).

26 Biographical and bibliographical information about Reverend Crane is taken from the back covers of Charles A. Crane, *The Bible and Mormon Scriptures Compared: or The Educational Process of Winning*



Reverend Crane is precisely the kind of dispassionate, neutral scholar to whom one would naturally go for an unbiased opinion of the Book of Mormon.

And what of the illustrious “ethnologist Dr. Gordon Fraser” (pp. 270, 284, 286)—who is presumably the same individual as the “ethnologist Dr. Gordon Frazer” (p. 262)? Reverend Fraser, who died in 1990, shows up in *Everything* both to praise Jerald and Sandra Tanner and to condemn Latter-day Saint belief in Joseph Smith’s First Vision and the Book of Mormon. But he had his own independent claim to fame, as well: He was the author of such ethnological classics as *Is Mormonism Christian?* (which is at least partially available in Spanish and Portuguese translations), *Joseph Smith and the Golden Plates: A Close Look at the Book of Mormon*; *A Manual for Christian Workers: A Workshop Outline for the Study of Mormonism*; *Sects of the Latter-day Saints*; and, with Bob Witte, *What’s Going on in Here?: An Exposing [sic] of the Secret Mormon Temple Rituals*—of which, all but the first are self-published.<sup>27</sup> The 1975 edition of *Contemporary Authors* describes him as holding an M.A.—he was seventy-seven years old at the time—but knows of no doctorate. At that time, too, *Contemporary Authors* lists “Indian anthropology” and “North American archaeology” as Reverend Fraser’s “avocational interests.”<sup>28</sup> By 1977, however, the biographical information given in his book *Is Mormonism Christian?* ascribes a doctorate to him—although there appears to be no record in the *Comprehensive Dissertation Index* of his ever having written a dissertation—and now, two years after his death, we find out that he was an “ethnologist.” Whatever his credentials as an academic social scientist, however, Reverend Fraser seems to have

*Mormons* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1977), and that book’s 1983 reprinting. Reverend Crane’s other two books are evidently not included in the collection at Brigham Young University.

<sup>27</sup> Gordon H. Fraser, *Is Mormonism Christian?* (Chicago: Moody, 1977); *Joseph Smith and the Golden Plates: A Close Look at the Book of Mormon* (Eugene: Industrial Litho, 1978); *A Manual for Christian Workers: A Workshop Outline for the Study of Mormonism* (Hubbard, OR: The Author, 1978); *Sects of the Latter-day Saints* (Eugene: Industrial Litho, 1978); and, with Bob Witte, *What’s Going on in Here?: An Exposing of the Secret Mormon Temple Rituals* (Eugene: Fraser, n.d.).

<sup>28</sup> Clare D. Kinsman, ed., *Contemporary Authors*, Permanent Series, vol. 1 (Detroit: Gale Research, 1975), 224.

shared Reverend Crane's scrupulously objective and rigorously neutral view of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: "Of all the present-day apostate religious cults," he wrote some years ago, "Mormonism is probably the most refined and subtle in its studied deception."<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere, he remarked that "Mormons, as a people, have never possessed . . . a modicum of common sense" and, denying even the genuineness of their spiritual impulses, declared that they "have never displayed any of the graces of religion in their migrations and settlements."<sup>30</sup> Such sympathy for human differences must, no doubt, have made Reverend Fraser a first-rate "ethnologist."

The unimpeachable "archaeologist Dr. Richard Fales" appears on page 314 to impeach the book of Abraham. Who is he? Frankly, it is very difficult to tell. A computer search of doctoral dissertations submitted to accredited institutions in the United States between 1861 and 1993 failed to find any mention of him. The multimillion-item collection in Brigham Young University's Harold B. Lee Library apparently contains no book nor even any independent pamphlet written by him. Even *Everything* only manages to quote him from one of John Ankerberg's own earlier tracts against Mormonism.

At one point, Ankerberg and Weldon refer to "Drs. Geisler and Nix, noted Biblical scholars" (p. 380). Our two experts are leading up to a discussion of the question "Is Mormon Biblical Scholarship Credible?"—to which they devote almost exactly two (2) pages (pp. 386–88). Needless to say, they really don't look at "Mormon Biblical Scholarship." For a change, though, they do actually cite a primary source—but, perhaps fearful of overindulging, only one. Their specimen of "Mormon Biblical scholarship" is Bruce McConkie's multivolume *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*. Where, however, are the works of Sidney Sperry? Why is there no reference to Hugh Nibley's *Old Testament and Related Studies*?<sup>31</sup> Where are the anthologies on the Bible edited by Kent Jackson and Robert Millet?<sup>32</sup> Why do

<sup>29</sup> Fraser, *A Manual for Christian Workers*, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Fraser, *Is Mormonism Christian?* 84, 183.

<sup>31</sup> Hugh Nibley, *Old Testament and Related Studies*, vol. 1 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1986).

<sup>32</sup> Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet, eds., *Studies in Scripture*, vol. 3, *The Old Testament: Genesis to 2 Samuel* (Salt Lake City: Randall, 1985); Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet, eds., *Studies in Scripture*, vol. 5, *The Gospels* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986);



Ankerberg and Weldon take no notice of Richard Anderson's fine book on the Apostle Paul or of Richard Draper's fascinating commentary on the Revelation of John?<sup>33</sup> Where are Victor Ludlow and Avraham Gileadi on the prophet Isaiah?<sup>34</sup> These are some of the works on the Bible by Latter-day Saints that Ankerberg and Weldon could have analyzed, but did not. Why not? Is one commentary by a single author enough evidence to justify summary judgment against "Mormon Biblical Scholarship"? Do two pages offer sufficient space in which to fully and fairly evaluate a multivolume work? No? Well, of course, it scarcely matters. For, manifestly, the point of Ankerberg and Weldon's cursory remarks is not analysis but blanket condemnation. And, once again, the intent is to contrast Mormon dwarfs with conservative Protestant titans. But who is the "noted Biblical scholar, Dr. Nix"? I honestly don't know. Brigham Young University's multimillion-volume library apparently possesses not a single book written by him. As for "Dr. Geisler," well, I assume that Ankerberg and Weldon have reference to Norman L. Geisler, professor of apologetics at Dallas Theological Seminary. Professor Geisler, one of the founders of the Evangelical Philosophical Society, is among the more competent minds in contemporary conservative Protestantism. He is quite prolific, and has written a number of interesting books—some of which I own and even admire—on subjects relating to, among other things, the Bible. But he is by training a philosopher, not a philologist or archaeologist or textual critic. Can he really be considered a "noted biblical scholar"? Would he be recognized as such by the wider community of professional biblical scholars? Probably not, which is not so much a reflection on Professor Geisler as it is on Ankerberg and Weldon's unpleasant urge to puff up the scholarly credentials of their own side and

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Robert L. Millet, ed., *Studies in Scripture*, vol. 6, *Acts to Revelation* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987).

<sup>33</sup> Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983); Richard D. Draper, *Opening the Seven Seals: The Visions of John the Revelator* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991).

<sup>34</sup> Victor L. Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982); Avraham Gileadi, *The Book of Isaiah: A New Translation with Interpretive Keys from the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988).



denigrate the credentials of those who dare to disagree with them.<sup>35</sup>

But then, maybe Ankerberg and Weldon are to be excused, since they apparently know little about contemporary biblical scholarship. Perhaps their reading in this field has been as limited as their reading on Mormonism. How else is one to understand such preposterous statements as, "It is an historical fact that the New Testament accurately records what Jesus and the apostles taught and did; this is the general consensus of informed biblical scholarship" (p. 77). Have they ever attended a meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature? Do they read the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, or the *Journal of Biblical Literature*? I am not pleased to report it, and I do not agree, but today's "general consensus of informed biblical scholarship" by and large *denies* that "the New Testament accurately records what Jesus and the apostles taught and did." Haven't Ankerberg and Weldon noticed this obvious fact? If not, I can only presume that they have missed it because they have limited their reading of biblical scholarship to the writings of those who share their conservative Protestant presuppositions and that they have simply not read the works of mainstream scholarship. (This is not implausible: It is, after all, their approach to Mormonism.)

But Ankerberg and Weldon are not primarily relying, in this unfortunate book, even upon conservative Protestant scholars. Instead, their favorite sources include such gems as the notorious nineteenth-century anti-Mormon hack "J. H. Beadle, Esquire," whom they honor for "his weighty preface to Bill Hickman's confession" (p. 414). Another star is the nineteenth-century apostate Fanny Stenhouse (pp. 415–17), who is featured alongside the incomparable Ann Eliza Webb Dee Young Denning (p. 413).<sup>36</sup> In the twentieth century, they turn for in-

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<sup>35</sup> Norman Geisler is officially titled a "professor of apologetics" and is the author of a book entitled *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988)—from the cover of which I have derived what I know of his biography. Ankerberg and Weldon nonetheless describe him as a "scholar," rather than as an "apologist." This contrasts with standard anti-Mormon terminology for Latter-day Saint scholars, who are almost always dismissed as mere "apologists," with a strong hint of pseudoscholarship. See, for example, n. 170 below.

<sup>36</sup> On whom see Hugh Nibley, "Sounding Brass," in Hugh Nibley, *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass*, vol. 11 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1991), 407–727. "Sounding Brass" was first published as an independent

sight to the insufferable fantasist and demagogue Ed Decker (pp. 250, 441–42). They even have the nerve, on page 316, to cite the infamous fraud Dee Jay Nelson!<sup>37</sup> Ankerberg and Weldon restrict themselves almost entirely to the testimony of enemies of the Mormons, and they believe every word of such testimony that they read. At one point, they actually recommend to “the interested reader” that he study the dime novels and tell-it-all exposés of nineteenth-century anti-Mormon bigotry, for “only then will he discover how great an evil Mormonism was” (p. 417).<sup>38</sup> Not content to recommend shoddy scholarship to others, though, they practice it enthusiastically themselves. And, in fact, this is how they arrive at some of their most stunning discoveries. Take this one, for example: “Incredibly, some Mormons teach that ‘through baptism for the dead [rites] the Mormons have saved more souls than Christ did when he died on the cross!’ ” (p. 177). Truly, this statement *is* incredible. It makes no sense whatever. Baptism is only efficacious at all through the atonement of Jesus Christ. To claim that baptism can save more people than Christ can is analogous to saying that there are more Australians than humans. Could any spokesman for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints ever have proclaimed, or even hinted at, so absurd a doctrine as our two scholars attribute to the Mormons? Not very likely. So where did Ankerberg and Weldon get it? Note their source: They quote it from an anti-Mormon named Einar Anderson, who quotes it from a Dr. Ironside, who in turn quotes it under unspecified conditions from an unnamed “Mormon elder” (p. 458 n.117). Where is room for doubt?

But among all the apostates and scandal-mongers and professional enemies of the Latter-day Saints who are their sources, one name looms far above the rest. That name is “Tanner.” Both the text of the book and its endnotes reveal Ankerberg and Weldon’s heavy (indeed, almost slavish) dependence upon the

book in 1963 and also offers useful insight into the trustworthiness of Fanny Stenhouse.

<sup>37</sup> For the fascinating saga of “Professor” Nelson, “Ph.D., Ph.D.,” see Robert L. and Rosemary Brown, *They Lie in Wait to Deceive: A Study of Anti-Mormon Deception* (Mesa: Brownsworth, 1981).

<sup>38</sup> It would be instructive to learn whether they also consider nineteenth-century anti-Catholic propaganda to be a historical treasure.



writings of Jerald and Sandra Tanner.<sup>39</sup> An appendix entitled "Who Was the Real Joseph Smith?" furnishes a nice illustration of Ankerberg and Weldon's lack of independence and originality. Leading into the question, they advise that "Mormons should not take our word for it. They should vigorously and impartially research the issue in a manner commensurate with its importance" (p. 54). So what kind of vigorous and impartial research have Ankerberg and Weldon done? There is, according to their endnotes, but one source for the appendix: Jerald and Sandra Tanner's *The Changing World of Mormonism*. Especially in the portions of the book dealing with the Book of Mormon, Latter-day Saint writers and scholars are rarely quoted directly; in a remarkable number of instances Latter-day Saint writing is cited from the Tanners or, far less commonly, from other anti-Mormons.<sup>40</sup> Ankerberg and Weldon have not confronted Latter-day Saint scholarship except in predigested form, excerpted for their convenience by others every bit as hostile to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as they are.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The book opens with an admiring "Foreword" by Sandra Tanner, and closes with a six-page "Resource List"—a catalogue of publications from the Tanners' Utah Lighthouse Ministries, complete with address for ordering. (The Tanners' address is also given on p. 446.) In between, Ankerberg and Weldon take occasion to praise "Jerald and Sandra Tanner, who are among the most knowledgeable people on Joseph Smith and Mormonism in the world today" (p. 54; cf. the glowing testimonials on 262–63). The Tanners are expressly thanked for their help on pp. 5 and 18.

<sup>40</sup> A nice example occurs at p. 471 n. 262, where we find a reference to "'Journal History,' June 3, 1859, as cited in Orrin Porter Rockwell, *Man of God, Son of Thunder*, 292–93, cited by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *The Mormon Kingdom*, 2:167." Incidentally, Ankerberg and Weldon are perhaps the first to notice Brother Rockwell's literary side. Harold Schindler wrote a book some years ago entitled *Orrin Porter Rockwell: Man of God, Son of Thunder* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1966); perhaps Schindler's biography of him influenced Port's own choice of a title when he himself turned to the word processor. Still, if I had been Rockwell's agent, I would have warned him that his title is just a bit too close to Schindler's.

<sup>41</sup> Something of Ankerberg and Weldon's tenuous relationship to primary sources comes through in the striking sloppiness of their endnotes. The anti-Mormon pamphleteer "Bob Witte," for instance, shows up as "Bob Whitte" (p. 464 n. 92, 466 n. 241, 467 nn. 276, 282–83), and the late Mormon antiquarian Wilford C. Wood is promoted to Wilford C. Woodruff (p. 309; 464 n. 140; 465 nn. 150, 160, 163). Hugh Nibley's "No Ma'am, That's Not History"—cited, not unexpectedly, from the Tanners rather than



Mormon arguments are seldom mentioned, and are never laid out or analyzed. Yet Ankerberg and Weldon see themselves as objective students of the subject and condemn those who do not follow precisely their own spectacularly unbalanced approach. "Any Mormon who can carefully read through even the Tanners' small library of material, weigh the evidence fairly, and yet decide to remain a Mormon is simply not being impartial" (p. 263).<sup>42</sup>

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personally consulted—becomes "No Man, That's Not History" (p. 466 n. 241). "Latayne C. Scott," once a Brigham Young University coed and now a writer of anti-Mormon exposés, is masculinized into "Scott C. Latayne" (p. 468 n. 50), while the late Latter-day Saint historian "Gustive O. Larson," onetime president of the Swedish Mission, has gone southward under the alias of "Gustavo Larson" (p. 468 n. 96). "Stanley Hirshson" becomes "Stanley Hirson" (p. 451 n. 50) and then "S. P. Hirshim" (p. 470 n. 194). "Thomas B. Marsh" becomes "Thomas B. March" (p. 452 n. 11). "Gordon B. Hinckley" becomes "Gordon B. Hinkley" (p. 434; 471 nn. 293, 298). The anti-Mormon "H. Michael Marquardt" undergoes metathesis, emerging as "Michael H. Marquardt" (p. 470 n. 210). Our two authorities can't decide between "Leland Gentry" (p. 471 nn. 267, 270) and "LeLand H. Gentry" (p. 452 n. 11), but give us a definitive "Paul Chesman" for "Paul Cheesman" (p. 463 n. 13). On p. 412, "Linda King Newell" becomes "L. K. Newall," and her book, written with Valeen Tippetts Avery, loses the first word of its title. John Cradlebaugh becomes "Cradelbaugh" (pp. 392, 423). "Richard Van Wagoner" is transformed into the rather more Teutonic (and operatic?) "Richard von Wagoner" (p. 445). The late "Richard Beal" appears on p. 29 as "Richard Peal." "Anthon H. Lund" disappears, only to reappear as "Anthony Lund" (p. 115). But it isn't only *people* who suffer from our two experts' poor spelling: On p. 363, for instance, we have "germaine" for "germane." On pp. 388 and 392, despite the fact that both of their sources spell the word correctly, our two scholars repeatedly give us "principals" for "principles." On p. 29, they give us a new federal agency, the "Department of Urban Housing and Development." And, they triumphantly demand, as they sneer at the geographical claims of the Book of Mormon (pp. 285–86), "Where are the plains of Nephaha?" A good question, really, since the Book of Mormon mentions no such place. (But see Alma 62:18.)

<sup>42</sup> For evaluations of the Tanners' trustworthiness as authorities on the Book of Mormon, see the reviews of their *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* by L. Ara Norwood, Matthew Roper, and John A. Tvedtnes in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 (1991): 158–230; Matthew Roper's review of *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 169–215; and Tom Nibley's critique of *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*

### Satanic Fantasies

Ankerberg and Weldon's approach attempts to walk a kind of *via media* between the Tanners' old-time traditional anti-Mormonism and what I have elsewhere termed "New Age anti-Mormonism."<sup>43</sup> (The latter is the movement whose chief luminaries include such demon-obsessed individuals as Ed Decker, Loftes Tryk, and Bill Schnoebelen.) It is quite clear that, whether or not *Mormons* are fascinated with the demonic and the occult, Ankerberg and Weldon are. They are true believers.<sup>44</sup> Occultism and necromancy are their key to the explanation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (see pp. 231–60).<sup>45</sup> This is not entirely surprising, since the publisher of this book, Harvest House, is also responsible for Ed Decker and Dave Hunt's *The God Makers*, and since, as we have already seen, John Weldon's fascination with demons is on public display in numerous books.

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and William J. Hamblin's analysis of their *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon* on pp. 273–89 and 250–72 of the current *Review*.

<sup>43</sup> See Daniel C. Peterson, "A Modern *Malleus maleficarum*," review of Loftes Tryk, *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon*, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 (1991): 231–60.

<sup>44</sup> Not surprisingly, John Weldon has recently dismissed Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, with evident weariness, as "just another occult-based system of religion." See his "Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism," 11. His weariness is justified. Viewed through his demonic lense, the entire world begins to seem dismally monochrome. I recall a prominent art historian, a Marxist, who managed to make every Gothic cathedral she discussed look just like every other by viewing each as merely yet another testament to the class struggle. Monomania can be many things, but it is certainly dull.

<sup>45</sup> The main authority followed by our two experts on this issue is D. Michael Quinn's *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*. No mention is made of the critical reviews that Quinn's book received. (See, for example, Stephen D. Ricks and Daniel C. Peterson, "The Mormon as Magus," *Sunstone* 12 [January 1988]: 38–39; Stephen E. Robinson, *BYU Studies* 27 [Fall 1987]: 88–95.) No hint is given that most Latter-day Saint historians probably do not accept most of Quinn's conclusions. By careful misinterpretation and not-so-subtle steering of the reader, though, Ankerberg and Weldon even get Parley Pratt to define "necromancy as 'one of the leading fundamental truths of Mormonism'" (p. 245). Indeed, as noted previously, "the current president and prophet of the church, Ezra Taft Benson, freely confesses to necromantic contacts" (p. 251).



So fixated are Ankerberg and Weldon on demons that, when they look at the faith of the Latter-day Saints, they can often see nothing else. In Mormonism, as opposed to legitimate religion (theirs), the words “supernatural” and “occult” are synonymous (p. 432; cf. 224, 256, 358). They don’t really argue for this equivalence; it is merely assumed. Likewise, Mormon revelation is not denied; it is simply recast as “spiritistic.”<sup>46</sup> Joseph Smith’s revelations are nothing but “necromantic encounters, or contacts with the dead.”<sup>47</sup> “To a significant degree,” Ankerberg and Weldon declare without evidence, “the *Book of Mormon* was really a product of spirit invocation and necromantic divination” (p. 235; cf. 236). Ankerberg and Weldon speak quite complacently of “Mormonism’s historic fascination with necromancy (which continues to this day)” (p. 234). “Mormon temples,” they say, “are houses to appease the dead, houses of necromancy” (p. 251; cf. 180).<sup>48</sup> Sounding very much like a supermarket tabloid or—perhaps not coincidentally—like a trashy television talk show, Ankerberg and Weldon reveal a shocking new form of child abuse: “Children as young as *twelve* years old can be baptized for the spirits of the dead!” (p. 432; italics in the original). Not a few innocent readers will begin at this point to think of crypts, swirling mist, swelling chords of organ music, and, perhaps, Bela Lugosi.

One of the main arguments that Ankerberg and Weldon use to establish the alleged Mormon practice of ritual murder in nineteenth-century Utah goes as follows:

We must remember that Mormonism is an occult religion. . . . It was founded and undergirded by occult practitioners who, collectively, engaged in a

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<sup>46</sup> See pp. 20, 37, 38, 39, 75, 176–77, 179, 223, 234, 235, 243, 244, 248, 258–59, 269, 271, 275, 341, 344. To be fair, Ankerberg and Weldon do allow for a range of possible explanations of the First Vision—a range that extends all the way from hostile to antagonistic: “That initial experience could have been anything—from pure invention, to religious suggestion and self-deception, to spiritistic manipulation” (p. 271). They prefer the latter option. Likewise, with regard to the book of Abraham, they allow for only three fatal possibilities: It is “either pure imagination, deliberate hoax, or spiritistic deception” (p. 315). Compare their proffered alternatives for the origin of the Book of Mormon, below. As always, the range of possibilities is carefully narrowed in order to eliminate in advance any option that would not devastate Latter-day Saint belief.

<sup>47</sup> See p. 35; cf. 36–37, 73, 75, 234–35.

<sup>48</sup> Compare Weldon, “Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism,” 11.



dozen different occult practices. And we must also remember that the power behind the occult is Satan. If Jesus called Satan a "liar" and "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44), it is hardly impossible that early Mormonism could have followed in the footsteps of the devil—whose respect for human life is less than commendable (p. 391).<sup>49</sup>

This is nothing more than conjecture building on hypothesis based on assumption. As history, were the charges not so serious, it would be laughable. I am entirely unconvinced by Ankerberg and Weldon's claim to recognize demons everywhere in Mormonism. I see no evidence. But I do recall that Lucifer is called "the accuser" in Revelation 12:10, and I remember that the Greek word *diabolos* means "slanderer" and "false accuser."

Nevertheless, Ankerberg and Weldon are rather more willing than the New Age purists to admit sheer human evil, as well as diabolical intervention, as an explanation for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. "Thus," they remark with

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<sup>49</sup> Incidentally, our two scholars promise first-hand evidence for blood atonement in early Utah, but only manage to supply the usual second-hand speculations of the apostates John Ahmanson and Fanny Stenhouse, some rumors dispensed by the bitterly anti-Mormon Judge Cradelbaugh (not, as they have it, "Cradelbaugh"), and a passage from Klaus J. Hansen that professes ignorance on the subject. As might have been predicted, the ultimate source for what little they have is the Tanners. Nonetheless, the paucity of their evidence does not hinder them from comparing The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to the notorious Charles Manson and his "Family" (391–94, 400–401). (Along the way, too, they work in an unjustified and semiliterate slur on Muhammad, the founder of Islam.) These are old accusations, particularly as directed against Brigham Young; they were the stuff of innumerable nineteenth-century dime novels. To my knowledge, however, no reputable historian takes them seriously. Even the non-Mormon historian E. B. Long, *The Saints and the Union: Utah Territory During the Civil War* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 49, declares that there is no "proof" for such stories, and they have always been strenuously denied by the Latter-day Saints. "I will say here," declared President Wilford Woodruff before the sixty-fourth annual general conference of the Church, on 8 April 1894, "and call heaven and earth to witness, that President Young, during his whole life, never was the author of the shedding of the blood of any of the human family; and when the books are opened in the day of judgment these things will be proven to heaven and earth." See Brian H. Stuy, ed., *Collected Discourses*, vol. 4 (Burbank: B. H. S. Publishing, 1991), 72–73.

reference to the Book of Mormon, “an impartial examination of the evidence reveals only three possibilities to explain the text: 1. Human invention, 2. Spiritistic inspiration, 3. A combination of both” (p. 275). Not surprisingly, they prefer the third option (see pp. 275–78, 282).<sup>50</sup> The Book of Mormon is “merely a product of nineteenth-century occultism” and “Joseph Smith was merely a common crystal gazer subject to occult fascinations” (p. 276). (That, I suppose, is why books like the Book of Mormon were so very common in early nineteenth-century America!)

### Condescension and Incomprehension

A constant refrain of irritation with Latter-day Saint stupidity runs through this remarkably unlovely book. Ankerberg and Weldon quote one of their anti-Mormon sources as saying, “It never ceases to amaze me the number of intelligent people that are in the Mormon Church that still accept things that cannot be substantiated” (p. 263). (Some readers might wonder just what happened to “faith,” “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” [Hebrews 11:1].) “What is most disconcerting,” marvel Ankerberg and Weldon, “is that modern Mormons do not seem to be concerned with . . . unquestionably false prophecy and refuse to recognize the implications” (p. 348; cf. 353).

This is the familiar language of prejudice: “They are not like Us. They are lower, less rational, less spiritually sensitive. They don’t think like normal people.” In-groups always exalt themselves by degrading out-groups. Prejudice finds it hard to recognize individual variation; it judges whole classes, without nuance. It makes no real attempt to understand why others think or act or appear differently; it condemns them because of the sheer fact that they do. It is prejudice that leads to the notion that other groups need to be controlled, even enslaved, for their own good. It is prejudice that has led, in some extreme cases, to concentration camps, holocausts, and ethnic cleansings. Ankerberg and Weldon should be ashamed of themselves for resorting to such language.

In Cairo some years ago, I spoke at length with a Muslim chemistry professor at the University of Cairo. He was aston-

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<sup>50</sup> In contrast to the triple options listed for the First Vision and the book of Abraham in n. 23, above, this triad—with its progression through thesis, antithesis, and final, satisfying synthesis—seems almost Hegelian.



ished when he learned that I was a Christian. "Do you really," he asked, incredulously, "believe that God had a Son, and that he allowed that Son to be murdered in order to buy himself off?" After expressing some reservations about how he had expressed the doctrine of the atonement, I replied that, yes, I did believe precisely that. "Oh!" he exclaimed. "How can any intelligent person believe in such nonsense?" Well, the fact is that highly intelligent people *have* accepted Christianity. (Origen, Athanasius, Augustine, Aquinas, Pascal, and Kierkegaard are among those who come immediately to mind.) But it was thought-provoking to find that my most sacred beliefs seemed insanely ludicrous to a highly educated outsider. It was enlightening to find Christianity, for once, in the minority, and Christian assumptions questioned as less than self-evident. How many times have I heard people say things like, "How can any intelligent person believe in Islam?" or "How can any intelligent person be a Catholic?" Yet people like al-Ghazālī and Iqbāl and Ibn Khaldūn have been Muslims, and the Catholic Church has claimed the loyalty of such people as Cardinal Newman and G. K. Chesterton and Jacques Maritain. Reflecting on this, and on my own experience as an Islamicist, I have come to formulate what might be termed Peterson's First Rule for the Study of Other Religions: If a substantial number of sane and intelligent people believe something that seems to you utterly without sense, the problem probably lies with *you*, for not grasping what it is about that belief that a lucid and reasonable person might find plausible and satisfying.

But one will look in vain in this uncharitable book for anything like an attempt at sympathetic understanding. Catty little formulations like "Emma Smith, one of Joseph Smith's wives" (276–77; cf. 307), are only the tip of the iceberg. Throughout Ankerberg and Weldon's wearisome volume, Latter-day Saint faith is demeaned as "pagan" and Mormonism is dismissed as a "cult" (p. 359).<sup>51</sup> What does any of this mean, though? Does it convey any objective information beyond the sheer nasty fact that Ankerberg and Weldon despise The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, despise its doctrine, despise its leaders, and despise its members?

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<sup>51</sup> For descriptions of Mormonism as paganism, see pp. 84, 84n, 98, 99, 111, 119, 130, 131, 143, 176, 177, 180–81, 203, 240, 341, 372, 422, 445. On the harsh, four-letter epithet *cult*, see Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 193–212.



The worst possible interpretation is placed on virtually everything Mormons and their presiding officers say and do. Thus, Joseph Smith's dying cry of "Oh Lord; my God!" is, to Ankerberg and Weldon, not a religious man's heartfelt appeal to his Heavenly Father but an "exclamation of unbelief" (p. 351). How this is so, they do not bother to explain. Thus, too, Joseph's letter to the Nauvoo Legion, asking them to rescue him and his friends from the hands of murderous mobs at Carthage Jail, is portrayed as sinister and discrediting (p. 351).<sup>52</sup> They do not bother to explain to us just why it was wrong for an innocent, wrongly imprisoned man to seek to save his own life, the life of his dear brother, and the lives of friends whose only crime was that they had chosen not to leave him to languish alone in jail. Ankerberg and Weldon's sympathies at Carthage are reserved for those who murdered the Prophet.<sup>53</sup> His assassination by a horde of armed bigots while locked up in jail becomes "a gun battle" in which he was "killed by townspeople" (p. 351).

For Ankerberg and Weldon, believing Latter-day Saints are "either engaging in wishful thinking or willful deception" (p. 263). Indeed, Mormons are victims of "a process of seemingly deliberate self-deception" (p. 99; cf. 300), or, at least, of "ignorance and conditioning" (p. 354). The leaders of the Church are liars, as are many of its members, and hypocrites, constantly receiving "revelations of convenience" that pander to their base and selfish desires.<sup>54</sup> Mormonism only "pretends" to honor the Bible, while, in fact, the Saints have, "from the beginning, denied it, demeaned it and attacked it" (p. 376). (Indeed, Mormons "profane" and attack God himself [p. 119].) "For the [Mormon] church to tell the world that it 'believes the Bible' is sheer hypocrisy" (p. 382). Notwithstanding all its talk

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<sup>52</sup> The quoted plea to "save him at all costs" is not in Joseph's words—as the third person pronoun should make obvious—but in Fawn Brodie's. On p. 397, supplying neither evidence nor any trace of an argument, they claim that Joseph Smith was a counterfeiter.

<sup>53</sup> This is not unprecedented among militant anti-Mormons. Thus, in *The Evangel* 39/8 [November 1992]: 1, 3, Robert McKay, of Utah Missions, Inc., cites extenuating circumstances not only for the Carthage mob that murdered Joseph Smith, but for the despicable "exterminating order" issued against the Latter-day Saints by Missouri's governor, Lilburn W. Boggs, in October 1838.

<sup>54</sup> See pp. 13, 15, 90n, 102, 303, 312, 341, 362, 410, 412, 443, 446. For those "revelations of convenience," see pp. 409, 422.

about marriage and the family, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints despises non-Mormon marriages, and its leaders actively break up families in order prevent members from accepting Christ (pp. 359–60, 434–36). Ankerberg and Weldon assure inquirers that “the Mormon church makes its converts largely on the basis of distortion” (p. 361), of “misinformation and distortion of fact” (p. 363), and through a “ruse” (p. 79). Latter-day Saint missionaries are “[engaged] in misrepresentation [and] consumer fraud” (p. 361). According to Ankerberg and Weldon, “a characteristic feature of Mormon apologetics [is] equivocation,” which they define as “the ambiguous use of words in order to conceal something” (p. 99). “It should be stressed,” say Ankerberg and Weldon, “that any claims by Mormon leaders and writers concerning official Mormon history, early doctrine, apologetics, etc., are generally not to be trusted” (p. 16). This, of course, is because of “the well-established tradition of Mormon distortion in religious matters” (p. 343).

Ankerberg and Weldon are engaged here in a textbook case of the logical fallacy known as “poisoning the well.” In fact, their behavior is remarkably reminiscent of the episode that gave the fallacy its name in the first place: The famous British Catholic convert John Henry Cardinal Newman often clashed with the Anglican novelist-clergyman Charles Kingsley. In the course of one of their disputes, Kingsley claimed that Newman, as a priest of the Roman Catholic church, did not value truth very highly—and so, presumably, would not argue fairly or honestly. Followers of the debate could not trust him. Cardinal Newman was understandably infuriated by the accusation. He protested that such a charge made it virtually impossible for him or for any other Catholic to be given a fair hearing. Kingsley, he said, had predisposed people to rule out anything at all that he might offer in defense of his religious beliefs. The Anglican writer had poisoned the well of discourse, making it difficult if not impossible for anyone to drink of it. (The allusion was to the common medieval rumor, whenever disease struck an area, that the Jews had “poisoned the wells.”) The logical purpose of “poisoning the well,” clearly, is to neutralize the arguments of an opponent before they have even been confronted. As one contemporary textbook of logic points out, “what such unfair tactics are ultimately designed to do” is, “by discrediting in advance the only source from which evidence either for or against a particu-



lar position can arise, . . . to avoid opposition by precluding discussion."<sup>55</sup>

Let us, however, proceed with the view of the Latter-day Saints presented by *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism*. What is it that motivates Mormons to serve their God and his Church—or, in Ankerberg and Weldon's charming alternative formulation, to deceive themselves and lie to others? Merely, Ankerberg and Weldon inform their readers, the lustful "anticipation of absolute power," "one of the most compelling and enticing motivators known to man" (p. 29n). Another factor, probably, is the urge toward "the eternal sexual right to produce never-ending spirit offspring and kingdoms in which to rule them" (p. 151). "Thus," explain Ankerberg and Weldon, "in the most alluring way possible Mormonism cements loyalty to its doctrines"—by offering believers the prospect of "eternal sexual pleasure" (p. 152). But the sneaky Latter-day Saints refuse to come clean on the sordid drives that fuel their evil religious activities, and Ankerberg and Weldon, speaking for all right-thinking Christians everywhere, demand that the pretense cease: "Mormons should no longer equivocate on this issue. If, like the devil, they want all the power, glory and attributes of God, they should state it clearly" (p. 211).

Ankerberg and Weldon persistently show their contempt for Latter-day Saint faith by the very language they use to portray it. Mormon doctrine, they report, is "bizarre" (p. 217), and "contradictory revelation" is "the general truism for most Mormon theology" (p. 225). Joseph Smith's revelations "deny every biblical doctrine they comment upon" (p. 342). Consider, too, this handy thumbnail sketch of Latter-day Saint doctrine: "What all Mormons, early or contemporary, do seem to agree upon is 1) the centrality of Joseph Smith, 2) salvation by works, and 3) opposition to Christianity. Beyond this, conflicting views abound" (p. 326).

Disparaging references to "the spirit-entity calling itself Moroni" and "the Mormon earth deity Elohim" do absolutely nothing to advance interfaith understanding.<sup>56</sup> Nor do allusions to "Mormonism and its gods" (p. 327; cf. 159, 160). Ankerberg

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<sup>55</sup> S. Morris Engel, *With Good Reason: An Introduction to Informal Fallacies*, 4th ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 1990), 196–97. I have drawn on Engel's discussion for the history of the fallacy.

<sup>56</sup> See p. 296; cf. 35–37, 154; also p. 310; cf. 116, 118, 132, 138, 140, 147, 203, 207, 219.

and Weldon imply, though, that their contemptuous lower case *g* merely reflects the Facts of History. No prejudice here! No attempt to poison the well! From the time of Joseph Smith, they inform their audience, Mormons have served “a different god” than that of Christians (p. 50).

“The Jesus Christ taught in the Mormon church,” say Ankerberg and Weldon, “[bears] no resemblance to the biblical Christ” (p. 445)—“not a single resemblance can be found between them” (p. 130).<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the Mormon Jesus is nothing but an “idol” (p. 154). At one point, Ankerberg and Weldon imply that something they term “the Second Coming of the god Joseph Smith” bears equal doctrinal weight for Latter-day Saints with “the Second Coming of the earth god Jesus” (p. 22). “Mormonism,” they say, “teaches that Jesus Christ is a ‘common’ god and of minor importance in the larger Mormon cosmology” (p. 133). Really? Are they speaking of a Church that believes of Jesus “that by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God” (D&C 76:24)? Are they purporting to summarize the teaching of a church whose scriptures affirm that he is “the light and the Redeemer of the world; the Spirit of truth, who came into the world, because the world was made by him, and in him was the life of men and the light of men. The worlds were made by him; men were made by him; all things were made by him, and through him, and of him” (D&C 93:9–10). Is the Jesus portrayed in such passages really “of minor importance”?

Yet the Church’s claim to be Christian is not only false, say Ankerberg and Weldon, but “unethical” (p. 422; cf. 81, 86).<sup>58</sup> “An objective evaluation of the evidence reveals that Mormonism is not Christian.”<sup>59</sup> Indeed, it is “anti-Christian.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> On this ridiculous claim, see Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 55–62.

<sup>58</sup> The late “Dr.” Walter Martin is one of the accusers arrayed by Ankerberg and Weldon against the unethical Mormons. Apparently, our two scholars have a delicious sense of irony. On Martin’s own remarkable character and career, see Brown and Brown, *They Lie in Wait to Deceive*, vol. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Ankerberg and Weldon assert on p. 38 that “Orthodox Christian denominations have always agreed on the major historic doctrines of the faith.” This is, however, not at all true, unless one defines “orthodox” in so narrow a way as to make the statement perfectly circular, so that denominations that do not agree or have not agreed are simply defined out of orthodoxy. In that case, our experts’ assertion is roughly analogous to the claim



"It denies and rejects virtually every Christian doctrine" (p. 341). Ankerberg and Weldon's speciously objective "Chart A: General Information on Mormonism" supplies such gems of insight as "*Attitude Toward Christianity: Hostile*" (p. 20; italics in the original).<sup>61</sup> Latter-day Saint "friendship with Christianity is only pretended," according to our two experts (p. 89). "The Mormon church teaches that Christianity is an evil religion" (p. 86; cf. 87).<sup>62</sup> "Joseph Smith . . . was convinced that God had appeared to him to inform him that Christianity was a false religion" (p. 35).

Supposedly, since Latter-day Saints claim to be Christians, this involves them in obvious self-contradiction: In Joseph Smith's First Vision, "God allegedly condemned His own church as an abomination" (p. 362).<sup>63</sup> A *leitmotif* of such anti-Mormon claims is that Latter-day Saints are unprecedentedly, preternaturally stupid—as, indeed, they would *have* to be if their position were as self-evidently insane as Ankerberg and Weldon say it is. Time and again, these two authorities insist that they understand better what Latter-day Saints believe than do those believers themselves.<sup>64</sup>

But this is typical of what can only be called an arrogant and judgmental approach to the beliefs of other people generally. "It is a hapless sign of the time," say Ankerberg and Weldon, "that tens of millions of people sincerely believe they are

that "all green vegetables share the same color." See Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 173–74.

<sup>60</sup> See p. 445; cf. 15, 79, 84, 89–93, 259.

<sup>61</sup> On this sort of nonsense, see Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 1–191, to which the long rhetorical question asked by Ankerberg and Weldon on p. 86 of their book can be profitably compared. See, too, Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?*

<sup>62</sup> Ankerberg and Weldon take 1 Nephi 13–14 to be an attack on "Christianity." I am, however, unaware of any Latter-day Saint who has ever so interpreted it. At the worst, some have seen in it a reference to Catholicism. But even this is probably a misreading. See Stephen E. Robinson, "Early Christianity and 1 Nephi 13–14," in Nyman and Tate, *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi*, 177–91, for a persuasive argument that the real target is Hellenism.

<sup>63</sup> See Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 169–71.

<sup>64</sup> As at pp. 102–3 and 216, and in the particularly obnoxious example on p. 179.

Christians and yet are wrong" (p. 81).<sup>65</sup> Ankerberg and Weldon and their ideological kin, you see, own the copyright on the word *Christian*. Those who want to join the club must do so by their leave. And the admission standards are very strict. In order to be a Christian, for instance, one must believe that the Bible is "God's inerrant word" and one must have "personally received Jesus Christ as [one's] Lord and Savior" (p. 81). In other words, one must be a Protestant fundamentalist. So much for Catholicism—"Christianity" also, we are informed, rejects the notion of Purgatory (p. 88)—and so much for Eastern Orthodoxy. So much, too, for moderate and liberal brands of Protestantism.<sup>66</sup>

### Beneath Notice

Alexander Pope counseled against superficial learning in a very familiar couplet: "A little learning is a dang'rous thing," he observed, "Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring."<sup>67</sup> John Ankerberg and John Weldon, having caught a few drops of spray, think themselves on the verge of intoxication. "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it," said the writer of Proverbs, "it is folly and shame unto him" (Proverbs 18:13). John Ankerberg and John Weldon, however, are not ashamed.

- They dismiss the Latter-day Saint claim of a universal apostasy in less than one page of loose and undocumented reasoning (p. 68). They do not even begin to confront the writings of Hugh Nibley, James E. Talmage, and others on the question.

- Ankerberg and Weldon spend nine pages (pp. 282–90) on the subject of "Archaeology and the Book of Mormon." As always, however, their task is greatly eased by the fact that, for them, Mormonism is a question with only one side. Archaeology, they say, has "failed to uncover a shred of evidence" to support the claims of the Book of Mormon, and, indeed, has "discredited" it (cf. pp. 275, 282, 289, 368). "The evidence is overwhelmingly negative. From almost any angle of study, the *Book of Mormon* fails to stand up to critical examina-

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<sup>65</sup> Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 185–91, denies that such a situation is possible.

<sup>66</sup> On pp. 160, 187, and 189, the Latter-day Saint understanding of "grace," which is one of the things that supposedly make Mormons non-Christian, is said to be similar to the Catholic understanding.

<sup>67</sup> Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (San Francisco: Nash, 1928), 11.



tion" (p. 273). Indeed, they crow, it has already been proven false—"something already done and not reversible" (p. 274).<sup>68</sup> "The antithesis between the Bible, which is accepted as a reliable archaeological guide by reputable archaeologists, and the *Book of Mormon*, which is accepted by none, is striking" (p. 289; cf. 287).<sup>69</sup>

Latter-day Saints, Ankerberg and Weldon reveal, resort to the irrationality of subjective spiritual testimonies because there is no evidence to support their beliefs (pp. 273; 366–68). "Mormons everywhere claim that the only real evidence for [the Book of Mormon] is subjective" (p. 300). "Even research by liberal but loyal Mormon legal and historical scholars have [*sic*] cast grave doubt upon Mormon credibility—causing the church to retreat further and further into the abyss of subjectivism in order to substantiate its truth claims."<sup>70</sup> This is hardly true, as the very existence of F.A.R.M.S. would have indicated to them, had they troubled themselves to look. But they did not want to look. They had another target in view: Our two fundamentalist authorities hate and fear the idea that someone might pray about the truth of the Book of Mormon, as Moroni 10:3–5 counsels its readers to do. Ironically, they adopt essentially the same stance that Laman and Lemuel took, two and a half millennia ago:

And I said unto them: Have ye inquired of the Lord? And they said unto me: We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us. Behold, I said unto them: How is it that ye do not keep the commandments of the Lord? How is it that ye will perish, because of the hardness of your hearts? Do ye not remember the things which the Lord hath said?— If ye will not harden your hearts, and ask me in faith, believing that ye shall receive, with diligence in keeping my commandments, surely these things shall be made known unto you. (1 Nephi 15:8–11)

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<sup>68</sup> This seems to be an anti-Mormon version of the old Soviet "Brezhnev doctrine"—according to which, once a country had fallen to the communists, it would never, could never, revert to capitalism.

<sup>69</sup> When this passage occurs, Ankerberg and Weldon have just (pp. 288–89) triumphantly refuted the folkloric notion, held by some uninformed Latter-day Saints, that the Smithsonian Institution and "the prestigious National Geographic Society" have used the Book of Mormon as a field guide to archaeological sites.

<sup>70</sup> See p. 445; cf. 17, 273–74, 366–68.

It is not an admission of any alleged weakness in the Latter-day Saint position to acknowledge that scientific and historical evidence for the restored gospel is not, and is not likely to be, definitive. Many questions remain as yet unresolved with regard to the Book of Mormon, just as they do with respect to the Bible or, for that matter, with respect to Homer, Herodotus, and Shakespeare. Scholarship, as real scholars themselves understand, is forever tentative with regard to significant issues. Neither archaeology nor philology nor the study of history yields religious certainty, as thoughtful Christians have known for many generations. "There is," wrote the seventeenth-century essayist Sir Thomas Browne, "as in Philosophy, so in Divinity, sturdy doubts and boisterous Objections, wherewith the unhappiness of our knowledge too nearly acquainteth us. More of these no man hath known than myself, which I confess I conquered, not in a martial posture, but on my knees."<sup>71</sup> If Ankerberg and Weldon wish to reject prayer as a method of achieving resolution and conviction, they are certainly free to do so. The Latter-day Saints, by contrast, will follow the teaching of scripture: "Ye must pray, for the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray" (2 Nephi 32:8; cf. James 1:5). We know the method works. The very restoration itself began with a prayer for wisdom (see Joseph Smith-History 1:11-20).

Ankerberg and Weldon, however, having rejected scriptural teaching on prayer, claim to find religious certainty instead in the ever shifting consensus of scholarship. "If the Book of Mormon were really history," they declare, "archaeological data would confirm it—as it [*sic*] has repeatedly confirmed biblical history and the history of other ancient cultures" (p. 282). "Many of the greatest archaeologists, from William F. Albright, of Johns Hopkins, to Millar Burroughs [*sic*; the name should be "Burrows"], of Yale, have stated publicly that archaeology confirms the Bible historically. No archaeologist has ever stated this for the *Book of Mormon*" (p. 290).

Alas, though, Ankerberg and Weldon grossly overstate both the archaeological weakness of the Book of Mormon and the archaeological strength of the Bible. For one thing, they ignore the vast difference between the state of development of Palestinian archaeology and that of Mesoamerican archaeol-

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<sup>71</sup> Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici and Other Writings* (London: Dent and Sons, 1945), 23.



ogy.<sup>72</sup> In the latter, collapse of the indigenous civilizations before the *conquistadores* created a sharp historical discontinuity. We have the names of almost none of the Classic Mayan and Olmec cities of two millennia ago, which is why they are known today under Spanish titles such as La Libertad and Tres Zapotes, Santa Rosa and El Mirador. Palestinian settlements, by contrast, frequently retain the names by which they have been known for millennia—e.g., Jerusalem, Gaza, Beersheba, Jericho, and Jaffa. This fact, coupled with the far greater resources and the larger numbers of experts that have been devoted to “biblical archaeology,” has ensured that research in Palestine is many decades ahead of that in Mesoamerica. Even so, however, archaeology comes nowhere *near* “confirming the Bible historically.” Ankerberg and Weldon offer no specific references for the alleged comments of W. F. Albright and Millar “Burroughs” that they cite, so we are unable to evaluate just what those two eminent scholars may have said. However, we are fortunate to have a statement on precisely this subject—archaeological evidence for the historical claims of the Bible—from one of the foremost living “biblical archaeologists,” Professor William G. Dever.<sup>73</sup> Does Dever believe that archaeology “confirms” the Bible? Manifestly, he does not. “The Bible,” he says,

has its limitations as a historical document. It is a composite of diverse genres—myths, folktales, epics, prose and poetic narratives, court annals, nationalist propaganda, historical novellas, genealogies, cult legends, liturgical formulas, songs and psalms, private prayers, legal corpora, oracles and prophecy, homily and didactic material, belles lettres, erotic poetry, apocalyptic and on and on.

To what extent is history embedded in these diverse genres? The myths of Genesis 1–11, comprising the “primeval history,” which deal with the creation, the flood and the distant origins of the family of man, can be read today as deeply moving literature,

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<sup>72</sup> See Hamblin’s review in this volume, 250–72, for a more detailed discussion.

<sup>73</sup> The following quotations are taken from William G. Dever, “Archaeology and the Bible: Understanding Their Special Relationship,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 16/3 (May/June 1990): 52–58, 62. Dever, incidentally, is well-known for his strenuous rejection of the term *biblical archaeology*.

with profound moral implications. They inform us about the thought-world of ancient Israel, but they can hardly be read in the literal or modern sense as history.

And the situation is not improved for the later chapters of Genesis and the Pentateuch. "After a century of modern research," Dever notes, "neither Biblical scholars nor archaeologists have been able to document as historical any of the events, much less the personalities, of the patriarchal or Mosaic eras." Archaeology, Dever says, "has not brought to light any direct evidence to substantiate the story that an Abraham lived, that he migrated from Mesopotamia to Canaan or that there was a Joseph who found his way to Egypt and rose to power there. . . . The tradition is made up of legends that still may be regarded as containing moral truths, but until now they must be regarded as of uncertain historical provenance." And what of Moses and the spectacular events of the Exodus from Egypt? "Absolutely no trace of Moses, or indeed of an Israelite presence in Egypt, has ever turned up. Of the Exodus and the wandering in the wilderness . . . we have no evidence whatsoever." As an example, Dever cites "recent Israeli excavations at Kadesh-Barnea, the Sinai oasis where the Israelites are said to have encamped for 38 years." Surely such a lengthy stay by such a large group, somewhere during or prior to 1200 B.C., would leave considerable evidence. And, indeed, the Israeli excavations at Kadesh-Barnea "have revealed an extensive settlement, but not so much as a potsherd earlier than the tenth century B.C." Moving forward in history to the settlement of the Israelites in Palestine, Dever notes once again that "the evidence is largely negative. In particular, the 'conquest model,' derived principally from the Book of Joshua, has been largely discredited. That Israel did emerge in Canaan in the early Iron Age is beyond doubt. But archaeology has not shown that the settlement followed a series of destructions, miraculous or otherwise." He also points out that "Joshua and Judges give differing accounts of the so-called conquest and settlement of Canaan—accounts that cannot be readily reconciled, especially when newer archaeological evidence is considered." Professor Dever's verdict is straightforward: "The Bible cannot simply be read at face value as history."

I do not reproduce such comments—which could, by the way, be multiplied indefinitely, and with regard to the New



Testament as well as the Old—because I like them, or because, as some anti-Mormons like to imagine, Latter-day Saints enjoy demeaning the Bible. I am not tempted to say, borrowing the language of Ankerberg and Weldon, that, “If the Flood (or the career of Abraham, or of Joseph, or of Moses, or the Exodus, or the conquest of Canaan as depicted in the Bible) were really history, archaeological data would confirm it.” Mormons believe in the historicity of biblical events. I do not necessarily agree with Professor Dever. But I do want to draw attention to the limitations of archaeology for “proving” religious beliefs. And I want to point out that Ankerberg and Weldon’s contrast between a Bible that is archaeologically “proven” and a Book of Mormon that is archaeologically “disproven” is bogus. It is patently phony and transparently self-serving. It rests on a misrepresentation, or at least on a misunderstanding, of what biblical archaeology actually says.<sup>74</sup> And it relies, as well, on a persistent refusal to look at what Latter-day Saint scholars are actually saying about the Book of Mormon.

It is sheer, brazen chutzpah<sup>75</sup> to publish a chapter on “Archaeology and the Book of Mormon” in 1992 without responding to, or even noticing, the work of John Sorenson, to say nothing of David Palmer, John Clark, F. Richard Hauck, Joseph Allen, and others.<sup>76</sup> There is no evidence that Ankerberg

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<sup>74</sup> The Fall 1992 issue of *Heart and Mind*, the newsletter of Gospel Truths Ministries, recently sent out from their headquarters in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to thousands of Latter-day Saint households, seeks to establish the same false dichotomy that Ankerberg and Weldon advance. The people at Gospel Truths Ministries actually have the audacity (on p. 4) to quote Dever’s essay as supporting the archaeological reliability of the Bible, when its overall tenor is, as I think my quotations from it demonstrate clearly enough, quite the contrary. For a full review of the *Heart and Mind* critique of the Book of Mormon, see William J. Hamblin, “Basic Problems with the Anti-Mormon Approach to the Geography and Archaeology of the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (Spring 1993): 167–91.

<sup>75</sup> Following the spectacular instance of divine intervention that ended his career as an enemy of the Church, Alma the Younger proclaimed that he had been delivered from “the gall of bitterness” (Mosiah 27:29; Alma 36:18). Ankerberg and Weldon give that interesting phrase new meaning.

<sup>76</sup> John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1985); David A. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico* (Bountiful: Horizon, 1981); John Clark, “A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies,” *Review of Books on the Book of*

and Weldon have any first-hand knowledge of serious Latter-day Saint scholarship on the Book of Mormon. They do, it is true, acknowledge (in a note on p. 283) that contemporary Book of Mormon scholarship tends to favor “a more limited geography” than the “traditional” view (which had Lehi’s descendants occupying the whole of North and South America), but their source for this is a conversation with Sandra Tanner, not their own acquaintance with the works of Sorenson, or Palmer, or Clark, or Hauck, or Allen.<sup>77</sup>

Let us examine a few specific issues:

- Closely following established anti-Mormon tradition, Ankerberg and Weldon cite the Smithsonian Institution’s “Statement Regarding the Book of Mormon” as damaging evidence against the truth of Latter-day Saint claims. Not surprisingly, they never mention John Sorenson’s careful evaluation of that statement, which has been available for more than a decade.<sup>78</sup>

- There is, say Ankerberg and Weldon, “no evidence at all” for the “wars and war implements” in the Book of Mormon (p. 285).

But they haven’t even looked at the evidence. In 1990, for example, F.A.R.M.S. published a sizeable anthology of papers on *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, dealing—alongside many other fascinating subjects—with the very issues in which our two scholars claim to be interested.<sup>79</sup> As far as Ankerberg and Weldon are concerned, however, that anthology—just like the rest of Latter-day Saint scholarship—does not exist.

*Mormon* 1 (1989): 20–70; F. Richard Hauck, *Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988); Joseph L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon* (Orem: S. A. Publishers, 1989).

<sup>77</sup> John L. Sorenson examines “traditional” Book of Mormon geographical notions—by no means a monolithic group—in *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book*, 2d ed. (Provo: F.A.R.M.S., 1992). Ankerberg and Weldon would like to tie Latter-day Saints to a “continent-wide” view of Book of Mormon history, because they think it is indefensible (p. 284; cf. 287, 288, 295).

<sup>78</sup> John L. Sorenson, “An Evaluation of the Smithsonian Institution ‘Statement Regarding the Book of Mormon,’” F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1982.

<sup>79</sup> Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, eds., *Warfare in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1990).



- Although they are ignorant of competent Mormon work, Ankerberg and Weldon are able to cite negative comments about the religious beliefs of the Latter-day Saints even at a remove of decades. The passage of time cannot, it seems, dull the brilliance of even the most mindless and offhand anti-Mormon slur. Thus, our two experts endorse a juvenile literary judgment from 1930: "Writing in 'The Centennial of Mormonism' in *American Mercury*, Bernard DeVoto correctly described [the Book of Mormon] as 'a yeasty fermentation, formless, aimless and inconceivably absurd' " (p. 299).<sup>80</sup>

But it is DeVoto's characterization of the Book of Mormon that is "absurd." Whatever else may be said about it, the Nephite record is anything but "formless," as has been shown in a large number of recent studies.<sup>81</sup> It is a sober and intricately structured work. Ankerberg and Weldon, though, have read none of the recent studies.

- Anthropology and genetics, our two scholars say, destroy the notion that the American Indians are descended from Israelites (p. 288). As they so commonly do, they simply rely on the authority of Jerald and Sandra Tanner for this claim. They look at no Latter-day Saint writing. Yet, had they examined even three pages of John Sorenson's work, they would have known that the situation is far more complicated than the Tanners let on.<sup>82</sup>

- There is, Ankerberg and Weldon assure their readers, absolutely no evidence of any migration of Israelites to America (p. 288). Is it any surprise to discover that they have never bothered to come to grips with the award-winning two-volume annotated bibliography on *Pre-Columbian Contact with the Americas across the Oceans* published in 1990 by Drs. John Sorenson and

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<sup>80</sup> It would be rash to interpret Ankerberg and Weldon's citation of a sixty-two-year old journalistic insult as evidence of their erudition. The passage from DeVoto is prominently featured in Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet*, 2d ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), 68–69.

<sup>81</sup> I discuss this issue, and provide numerous references, in my "Editor's Introduction: By What Measure Shall We Mete?" in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 2* (1990): vii–xxvi. More studies have appeared since that time. Among the most recent is S. Kent Brown, "The Prophetic Laments of Samuel the Lamanite," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (Fall 1992): 163–80.

<sup>82</sup> Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*, 87–89.

Martin Raish?<sup>83</sup> Hardly. Nor have they looked at the other writings of Professor Sorenson on this subject.<sup>84</sup> Nor do they betray any acquaintance with the work of the eminent non-Mormon historian and philologist Cyrus Gordon, or the fascinating essay of J. H. McCulloch on the so-called "Bat Creek Inscription."<sup>85</sup> Are they aware of recent linguistic research that finds over two hundred apparent correspondences between Hebrew and the Uto-Aztecan languages?<sup>86</sup> If they are, they aren't telling.

- Ankerberg and Weldon insist that the Book of Mormon was produced according to "a mechanical dictation theory of translation. As such, it leaves no room whatever for changes in the text" (p. 277; cf. 306–9). "Thus," they claim, "the original 1830 edition of the English text should have become God's word, letter for letter. Not a single alteration should have oc-

<sup>83</sup> John L. Sorenson and Martin H. Raish, *Pre-Columbian Contact with the Americas across the Oceans: An Annotated Bibliography*, 2 vols. (Provo: Research Press, 1990). Also relevant is Kirk A. Magleby's "A Survey of Mesomamerican Bearded Figures," F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1979. For a survey by a non-Mormon of the vast body of evidence indicating the probability of pre-Columbian transoceanic contact between the Old and New Worlds, see Stephen C. Jett, "Precolumbian Transoceanic Contacts," in Jesse D. Jennings, ed., *Ancient South Americans* (San Francisco: Freeman, 1983), 336–93.

<sup>84</sup> Including "The Significance of an Apparent Relationship between the Ancient Near East and Mesoamerica," first published in the anthology by Carroll L. Riley et al., eds., *Man across the Sea: Problems of Pre-Columbian Contacts* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 219–41, and "Some Mesoamerican Traditions of Immigration by Sea," first published in *El Mexico Antiguo* in 1955; F.A.R.M.S. reprints of both are available. Professor Sorenson has long contended, by the way, that the Book of Mormon's Israelite colonists were only one element among others in the New World. For his most recent statement on the subject, see John L. Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (Fall 1992): 1–34.

<sup>85</sup> For instance, Cyrus H. Gordon, "A Hebrew Inscription Authenticated," in Lundquist and Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also by Faith*, 1:67–80; J. H. McCulloch, "The Bat Creek Inscription: Cherokee or Hebrew?" *Tennessee Anthropologist* 13/2 (Fall 1988): 79–123; J. Huston McCulloch, "The Bat Creek Inscription: Did Judean Refugees Escape to Tennessee?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* (July/August 1993): 46–53, 82; P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., "Let's Be Serious about the Bat Creek Stone," *Biblical Archaeology Review* (July/August 1993): 54–55, 83

<sup>86</sup> Brian Stubbs, "Elements of Hebrew in Uto-Aztecan: A Summary of the Data," F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1988.



curred, even in grammar and spelling” (p. 292; cf. 295). Notice here how debatable conclusions drawn from a dubious assumption become absolute certainty. And notice, again, how Ankerberg and Weldon tell the Latter-day Saints what they ought to believe: “A divinely translated text is just that, and Mormons should accept the implications” (p. 306). But such changes *have* occurred (p. 308).<sup>87</sup> Therefore, the Book of Mormon is false. Not only that, but there were grammatical errors, they say, in the original 1830 edition (p. 309). Yet grammatical errors cannot be admitted in a book that is supposedly divinely inspired (p. 310).

This is really quite astonishing. Ankerberg and Weldon are disgusted with the Latter-day Saints because we don't hold a belief that, if we held it, would make us easier targets. Undeterred, however, they simply ascribe the belief to us anyway, and then proceed with their attack. They show no awareness, though, of studies of the translation process by Latter-day Saints, studies that argue strongly against any notion of a “mechanical” translation.<sup>88</sup> They don't even look at the revelation given to Oliver Cowdery on the method of translation—known today as the ninth section of the Doctrine and Covenants, and received in April of 1829—which describes a process that is anything but automatic (see especially D&C 9:7–9). This is significant. Any reasonable investigation would have to take this early document, one that comes directly from Joseph Smith, as primary evidence on the mode of translation.

As usual, though, Ankerberg and Weldon look only to sources that agree with their prejudices. In support of their position, they cite Jerald and Sandra Tanner. The Tanners, in turn, cite Oliver B. Huntington, who cites Joseph F. Smith. President Smith describes the method by which the Book of Mormon was produced in a way that might possibly imply a mechanistic and inerrant translation process (p. 307). Highly impressive. Who could reasonably question a third- or fourth-hand citation of the eyewitness testimony of Joseph F. Smith, describing events that occurred approximately ten years before his own birth in 1838?

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87 And they have also occurred, as Ankerberg and Weldon note, in the Doctrine and Covenants (p. 312).

88 B. H. Roberts's “Translation of the Book of Mormon” was originally published in the *Improvement Era* in 1906, and is available as a reprint from F.A.R.M.S. Stephen D. Ricks's examination of “Joseph Smith's Means and Methods of Translating the Book of Mormon,” published by F.A.R.M.S. in 1984, should be required reading for anyone interested in the subject.

(President Smith was five and a half years old when his father Hyrum and his uncle the Prophet were murdered by anti-Mormons in 1844.)

Thus, Ankerberg and Weldon carefully tailor the evidence to agree with their conclusions. They then announce certain implications that they claim to have found in their evidence. Finally, they demand that Latter-day Saints accept the implications that their fundamentalist Protestant hermeneutic, motivated in this case by manifest hostility, has illegitimately derived from a skewed and artificially limited sample of evidence. Is it time to run up the white flag?

But let us, for the sake of argument, momentarily accept the highly suspect assumptions of Ankerberg and Weldon. Even if the mental process of translation were inerrant and infallible, this would by no means imply that the manuscript or the printed versions of the Book of Mormon should be inerrant, for, by all accounts, Joseph Smith orally translated the Book of Mormon which was then written down by Oliver Cowdery and the other scribes. Thereafter a printer's manuscript was prepared (inserting a variety of changes) and the book finally printed. Thus any grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors in the text could theoretically be accounted for as errors of transmission by scribes and the printer. (This, of course, is the argument used by all fundamentalists to account for the wide array of spelling and grammatical errors and manuscript variants in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament.) Thus if the Book of Mormon falls because of grammatical or other errors and manuscript variants, then so must the Bible. But the Latter-day Saints are far more sensible than this; we simply reject the fundamentalist presupposition of inerrancy of scripture.

• "Mormonism," declare Ankerberg and Weldon, "has never explained how godly Jews [*sic*] of A.D. 400 allegedly knew Egyptian, nor why they would have written their sacred records entirely in the language of their pagan, idolatrous enemies" (p. 284). "How likely is it that the allegedly Jewish [*sic*] Nephites would have used the Egyptian language to write their sacred scriptures? Their strong antipathy to the Egyptians and their culture makes this difficult to accept. When modern Jews copy their scripture, they use Hebrew. They do not use Egyptian or Arabic, the language of their historic enemies" (pp. 294–



95).<sup>89</sup> Besides, “no such language [as reformed Egyptian] exists and Egyptologists declare this unequivocally” (p. 294).

Is that so? Who are these Egyptologists who deny the existence of “reformed Egyptian”? (A name or two might have been useful.) By what authority do these alleged Egyptologists speak? Why is the term *reformed Egyptian* not a perfectly reasonable way to describe the Hieratic or Demotic scripts? How can they possibly know that a language did not exist? Why would an Egyptologist—whose expertise centers (as his title implies) on Egypt, and not on pre-Columbian America—have any particular competence to pronounce judgment on a language, now almost wholly lost, that once may have existed in Mesoamerica? Remember that the Nephite language was unique (see Mormon 9:34), especially after a thousand years of independent linguistic evolution. (The *Beowulf* poem arguably represents a form of English that is a thousand or so years old. Anyone who has ever tried to read it in its original can testify that it differs considerably from the English of contemporary newspapers.) Reformed Egyptian evidently never existed anywhere but among the people who wrote the Book of Mormon. No original text in the language is currently available for a linguist to examine.

And who says that the Nephites wrote in Egyptian? That is certainly one possibility, but several scholars (e.g., Sidney Sperry, John Sorenson, and John Tvedtnes) suggest, rather, that the language of the Nephites was Hebrew, written in Egyptian characters.<sup>90</sup> The practice of representing one language

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<sup>89</sup> Ankerberg and Weldon’s lack of knowledge extends not only to things Latter-day Saint, but also to the history of the Bible as well. The statement “When modern Jews copy their scripture, they use Hebrew. They do not use Egyptian or Arabic, the language of their historic enemies” is quite an astonishing display of ignorance. Since the Egyptian language has been dead for centuries, it is hardly remarkable that modern Jews do not read the Bible in Egyptian. On the other hand, “the first and most important rendering [of the Old Testament] from Hebrew [into Arabic] was made by Sa’adya the Ga’on, a learned Jew who was head of the rabbinic school at Sura in Babylon (died 942)” (George A. Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* [hereafter *IDB*], 4 vols. and supplement [Nashville: Abingdon, 1962–1976], 4:758b). Thus, Jews have indeed translated the Bible into “Arabic, the language of their historic enemies.” They also have translated it into the language of their “historic enemies” the Greeks (*IDB* 4:750b on the Septuagint) and Aramaeans (*IDB* 1:185–93; 4:749–50, on the Aramaic Targums).

<sup>90</sup> Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 31–39; Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*,

in a script commonly associated with another language is very common. Yiddish, for instance, which is basically a form of German, is routinely written in Hebrew characters. Swahili can be written in either Roman or Arabic scripts. Judeo-Arabic, as written for instance by Moses Maimonides, was medieval Hebrew written with Arabic letters. In fact, almost any textbook of colloquial Arabic or Chinese or Japanese aimed at Western learners will use the Latin alphabet to represent those languages. Language and script are essentially independent. Turkish, which used to be written in a modified Arabic script, has been written in Latin letters in the Republic of Turkey since the 1920s. However, in the areas of the old Soviet Union, it is now usually written in Cyrillic (Russian) characters. Likewise, perhaps the major difference between Hindi and Urdu may be the mere fact that the former uses a Devanagari writing system, while the latter uses a modified Arabo-Persian script. So this phenomenon of changing the script with which one writes a language is by no means unusual.

But we need not speak only in theoretical terms. We have, in fact, an ancient illustration that comes remarkably close to the Book of Mormon itself. Papyrus Amherst 63, a text from the second century B.C., seems to offer something very much like “reformed Egyptian.” It is a papyrus scroll that contains Aramaic texts written in a demotic Egyptian script. (Aramaic is a language closely related to Hebrew. Part of the Old Testament book of Daniel is written in Aramaic, and it was the spoken language of Jesus and his apostles. Incidentally, however, a Christian form of the language, Syriac, came to use an alphabet related to Arabic—again illustrating the independence of script and tongue.) Interestingly, one of the items found on Papyrus Amherst 63 is a version of Psalm 20:2–6. Ankerberg and Weldon wonder why “godly Jews [*sic*] . . . would have written their sacred records entirely in the language of their pagan, idolatrous enemies.” Perhaps they should ask them some day, for godly Jews most certainly did.<sup>91</sup>

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74–81; John A. Tvedtnes, in *A Sure Foundation: Answers to Difficult Gospel Questions* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 21–27; John A. Tvedtnes, “The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 77–91.

<sup>91</sup> See “Language and Script in the Book of Mormon,” *Insights: An Ancient Window* (March 1992): 2.



- “The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls’ Book of Isaiah has remarkably confirmed the extant scriptural account,” declare Ankerberg and Weldon, “while it has repudiated the *Book of Mormon* excerpts from Isaiah” (p. 291).

How could this argument even possibly be true? Isaiah prophesied and, presumably, wrote during the second half of the eighth century before Christ, approximately between 740 and 701 B.C. The Dead Sea Scrolls text of Isaiah—great manuscript discovery though it is—goes back only to the first, or perhaps to the second, century before Christ, which is to say that it is 600–700 years removed from the prophet himself. It is more distant from Isaiah than we are from Chaucer. Even if the Dead Sea text of Isaiah were identical in every detail to the Masoretic text that underlies the King James Bible, that would not prove the Book of Mormon wrong, since six or seven centuries provide far more than enough time for tampering or faulty transmission.

But the Dead Sea Isaiah scroll is *not* identical to the Masoretic text. Competent Mormon scholarship has, in fact, been directed toward this issue, and has come to conclusions dramatically at variance with those of Ankerberg and Weldon.<sup>92</sup> “It has long been my contention,” John A. Tvedtnes wrote in 1984, “that the best scientific evidence for the Book of Mormon is not archaeological or historical in nature, as important as these may be, but rather linguistic. . . . One of the more remarkable linguistic evidences for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon as a translation from an ancient text lies in the Isaiah variants found in it.”<sup>93</sup> Somehow, though, it is not surprising to learn that Ankerberg and Weldon have overlooked Latter-day Saint scholarship on this issue.

- Drawing on the anti-Mormons Hal Hougey and Anthony Hoekema, as well as their chief gurus, the ever-present Jerald and Sandra Tanner, Ankerberg and Weldon identify two main

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<sup>92</sup> See, for instance, John A. Tvedtnes, “The Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon,” F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1981; John A. Tvedtnes, “Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon,” in Monte S. Nyman, ed., *Isaiah and the Prophets* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1984), 165–77; also Sidney B. Sperry, “The Isaiah Problem in the Book of Mormon,” *The Improvement Era* (September 1939): 524–25, 564–69; (October 1939): 594, 634, 636–37; Sidney B. Sperry, “The Isaiah Quotation: 2 Nephi 12–24,” F.A.R.M.S. paper, n.d. For Latter-day Saint works on Isaiah generally, see Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet*; Gileadi, *The Book of Isaiah*.

<sup>93</sup> Tvedtnes, “Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon,” 176.

sources from which the Book of Mormon was allegedly plagiarized. The first is Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews*, and the second is the King James Bible. The "argument" for these sources advanced by our two experts covers just slightly more than two pages (pp. 279–81). In a brief paragraph on page 282, they also list five supposed secondary sources, for which they are likewise dependent on the Tanners. They offer no argument, but confidently conclude on the strength of their own assertion that "this is proof [!] that the *Book of Mormon* could not have been a translation of ancient records." No dissent is allowed. Predictably, they show no awareness of Latter-day Saint writing on these questions.<sup>94</sup>

Now, one must admit that certain elements in the Book of Mormon have their parallels in the Bible. And a few even have parallels in *View of the Hebrews*. All that remains to be accounted for is the overwhelming remainder of the Book of Mormon, including its plot, its characters, its structure, its powerful doctrinal teachings, its meaning, and the many believable details of culture and linguistics and history that it contains.<sup>95</sup> So neither the Bible nor *View of the Hebrews* adequately explains the Book of Mormon.

I, however, am about to solve the mystery. There is a book that neither Ankerberg and Weldon nor even the Tanners have considered. There is a printed document that—while it still does not account for plot, structure, theology, meaning, and details—can be shown to have almost innumerable parallels to every verse of the Book of Mormon: It is Noah Webster's

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<sup>94</sup> See, for example, Spencer J. Palmer and William L. Knecht, "View of the Hebrews: Substitute for Inspiration?" *BYU Studies* 5 (1964): 105–13; John W. Welch, "An Unparallel: Ethan Smith and the Book of Mormon," F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1985; David Palmer, "Survey of Pre-1830 Historical Sources Relating to the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 17/1 (Autumn 1976): 101–7; Robert Paul, "Joseph Smith and the Manchester (New York) Library," *BYU Studies* 22/3 (Summer 1982): 333–56.

<sup>95</sup> Stephen Ricks's comment on Wesley Walters, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 250, is apropos here: "Wesley Walters is among the most skilled in the craft of anti-Mormon writing. And yet what has he come up with? He has implicitly introduced a general theory to explain the origin of the Book of Mormon. Even if we were to allow all that Walters claims—the Old Testament quotations, the New Testament steals, the egregious anachronisms, the eschatology filched from Ethan Smith—how much of the Book of Mormon would thus be 'explained'? A half? A third? A fourth? I doubt even close to that much."



*American Dictionary of the English Language*. This great work was published in 1828 and would have been, therefore, available to Joseph Smith. Apart from a few score proper names, virtually every word in the Book of Mormon can be demonstrated to have existed earlier in Mr. Webster's dictionary.<sup>96</sup> As an explanatory device for the Book of Mormon, then, Webster is a far more powerful tool than either Ethan Smith or the Bible.

• Ankerberg and Weldon denounce the Eleven Witnesses to the Book of Mormon as "gullible," "psychologically unstable," and "religiously insecure," claim that they lacked "personal character," and complacently allude to their utter "absence of credibility." Our two authorities even say that certain of the Witnesses came to doubt their own testimonies. Thus, all we are left with is "the testimony of unreliable men who think they *may* have seen" the plates (pp. 295–99, 446).

But this is an outrage. It is outrageous that two purported scholars of Mormonism would pretend, in 1992, to have examined the evidence on the Witnesses sufficiently to reject their testimony, without refuting—nay, without once referring to or citing—the works of Eldin Ricks (1961), Milton Backman (1983), Rhett James (1983), and especially Richard Lloyd Anderson (1981).<sup>97</sup> There is no point in responding with detailed answers to Ankerberg and Weldon's stale allegations against the Witnesses. Those assertions have been dealt with many times

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<sup>96</sup> There is, however, undeniable evidence for the existence of a yet more comprehensive "source": *Every* word in the Book of Mormon, *including* its novel proper names, is written in the alphabet conventionally associated with English. Anti-Mormons would do well, however, to avoid this potentially powerful argument, for the alphabet can easily be shown to derive, ultimately, from the ancient Near East and, specifically, from the Levant—just what the Latter-day Saints claim for the Book of Mormon itself.

<sup>97</sup> Eldin Ricks, *The Case of the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Olympus, 1961); Milton V. Backman, Jr., *Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration* (Orem: Grandin Book, 1983), republished in 1986 by Deseret Book; Rhett Stephens James, *The Man Who Knew: The Early Years* (Cache Valley: Martin Harris Pageant Committee, 1983), dealing with Martin Harris; Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981). Fascinating collateral materials are supplied by Susan Easton Black, ed., *Stories from the Early Saints: Converted by the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), which I reviewed in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 13–19.

before.<sup>98</sup> And new evidence supporting the veracity of the Witnesses continues to appear. I cannot see how anyone can possibly read Lyndon Cook's recently published anthology of *David Whitmer Interviews* and imagine for a moment that David Whitmer was an "unreliable man" who merely thought he "may have seen" the angel and the plates.<sup>99</sup> It is awfully difficult to remain patient with this sort of slipshod pseudoscholarship.

Ankerberg and Weldon even compare the allegedly dishonest and traitorous Witnesses to the Savior's twelve original apostles, and find "a stark contrast" with those ancient Israelite "men of integrity" (pp. 298–99). One can only marvel. Perhaps Ankerberg and Weldon have never heard of Judas Iscariot or Peter's denial of Christ?

### **Are the Latter-day Saints Would-Be Fundamentalists?**

Ankerberg and Weldon constantly demand that Latter-day Saints be accountable to standards derived from fundamentalist traditions, rather than to standards growing out of Mormons' own beliefs. They repeatedly censure Mormons and Mormonism for failure to attain a goal to which no Latter-day Saint ever aspired.

• Ankerberg and Weldon announce a very tough test that the Book of Mormon must pass: If there are any errors at all in it, it cannot be depended upon in even the slightest degree (p. 305). But this principle has been rejected by all but the most hard-core fundamentalist Christians with regard to the Bible. Why should anyone accept it with regard to the Book of Mormon? Who gave Ankerberg and Weldon the right to impose their requirements on the Latter-day Saints? Condemning the Mormons because they are not inerrantist fundamentalists is rather like denouncing an oval because it is not perfectly round. The Book of Mormon has never *claimed* to be infallible or inerrant. Instead, it has admitted that it may well contain errors, but has warned those who would condemn it out of a passion for fault-finding and a rejoicing in iniquity. "And now," says the very title page of the Book of Mormon, "if there are faults they

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<sup>98</sup> See, for example, Matthew Roper's remarks on some of the standard charges, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 170–76.

<sup>99</sup> Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem: Grandin Book, 1991). See my discussion in this volume of the *Review*, 113–15.



are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment-seat of Christ." Consider, too, the comments of Moroni as found in Ether 12:23, 25, 26, 36–37:

And I said unto him: Lord, the Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing. . . . When we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words; and I fear lest the Gentiles shall mock at our words. And when I had said this, the Lord spake unto me, saying, Fools mock, but they shall mourn. . . . And it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord that he would give unto the Gentiles grace, that they might have charity. And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me: If they have not charity it mattereth not unto thee, thou hast been faithful.

• In 2 Nephi 14:5, the Book of Mormon follows KJV Isaiah 4:5 in rendering the Hebrew *chuppah* as "defence": "For upon all the glory of Zion shall be a defence." But the proper reading, say Ankerberg and Weldon, should have been not "defence," but "canopy" (p. 322). Therefore, they contend, the Book of Mormon is fraudulent.

Their reading of *chuppah* is, it must be admitted, correct. It has the support of the majority of modern translations. But does the Book of Mormon's "defence" represent so serious a distortion of Isaiah's meaning, so serious an error, as to call into question its own antiquity? I think not. The ancient Latin translation of the Bible known as the Vulgate seems to have interpreted Isaiah 4:5 in the same way as did the King James translators, rendering the last phrase of the verse as *Super omnem enim gloriam protectio*. The ancient Greek Septuagint, on the other hand, has *pasē tē doxē skepsthēsetai*, in which the final verb is clearly related to the nouns *skepas* and *skepē*, both of which mean "covering" or "shelter." The Jewish Publication Society's translation, *Tanakh*, says that the "canopy . . . shall serve as a pavilion for shade from heat by day and as a shelter for protection against drenching rain." The *New Jerusalem Bible* says that it will give "refuge and shelter from the storm and the rain," using much the same language as does the *New English Bible*. The Evangelical Protestant New International Version says that the "canopy . . . will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day,

and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.” Is “defence” really so very out of place in such a context?

• In 2 Nephi 15:25, say Ankerberg and Weldon, the Book of Mormon follows KJV Isaiah 5:25 into error when it reads the Hebrew *suchah* as “torn,” rather than as “refuse” (p. 322). The full text of Isaiah 5:25 reads as follows in the King James Version:

Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

This is identical to 2 Nephi 15:25, as anti-Mormons like to point out. What of it? Let me clearly say, first, what no thinking Latter-day Saint has ever dreamed of denying: There is some sort of close relationship between the King James translation of Isaiah and the version that appears in the English translation of the Book of Mormon. The precise nature of this relationship is not altogether clear, despite what critics of Joseph Smith are wont to allege. (Eyewitnesses to the translation process, for example, insist that Joseph had no books or written materials with him when translating, other than the plates themselves.)<sup>100</sup> Secondly, it is true that “refuse” is a better translation of *suchah* than is “torn.” However, one must ask whether the difference is really so great as to justify total rejection of the Book of Mormon. I have already quoted KJV Isaiah 5:25. Now, let us compare the rendering of that verse in the New International Version of the Bible, so popular among conservative modern Protestants:

Therefore the Lord’s anger burns against his people; his hand is raised and he strikes them down. The mountains shake, and the dead bodies are like refuse in the streets. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

Obviously, the meaning and significance of the verse are essentially unaffected by taking *suchah* as “refuse” rather than as “torn.” The point is still the same. We can only speculate as to

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with Emma Hale Smith Bidamon by her son Joseph Smith, III, in *Saints’ Herald* 26 (1 October 1879): 289.



why the Lord inspired Joseph Smith to render these passages in the idiom of the King James Version. Perhaps early nineteenth-century Bible believers would have been offended by seeing Isaiah in “unbiblical language.” Perhaps, for the same reason, there would have been more loss than gain in making alterations, even improvements, to unimportant elements of the text. (The English translation of the Book of Mormon is unafraid to make changes in quoted biblical texts, as the work of such scholars as John Tvedtnes and John Welch, characteristically unnoticed by Ankerberg and Weldon, makes abundantly clear.)<sup>101</sup>

Is the fact that the translation of the Book of Mormon follows the King James Version any more remarkable than the fact that the New Testament almost invariably follows the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament, even when the Septuagint disagrees with the Masoretic text? If we are to denounce the Book of Mormon as an uninspired fraud because it generally (but not slavishly) follows the standard translation of its day, must we not also jettison the New Testament?

• What, demand Ankerberg and Weldon, are the Greek names “Timothy” and “Jonas” doing in 3 Nephi 19:4 (p. 322)?

Ankerberg and Weldon show no awareness of Hugh Nibley’s comments on the issue of Greek names in the Book of Mormon. Now they also need to take a look at Stephen Ricks’s brief statement on the question.<sup>102</sup> (That is one of the problems of not keeping up with the literature of the field in which you claim to be an expert. You just keep falling further and further behind.)

### The Straw Man

Ankerberg and Weldon are inordinately fond of the technique of damning Mormonism for problems that it does not

<sup>101</sup> Tvedtnes, “The Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon”; John A. Tvedtnes, “Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon”; John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount: A Latter-day Saint Approach* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1990).

<sup>102</sup> Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, vol. 6 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, 3d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988), 285, 289–90; Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert/The World of the Jaredites/There Were Jaredites*, vol. 5 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988), 33; Stephen D. Ricks, “I Have a Question: Greek Names in the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign* 22 (October 1992): 53–54.

have, problems that are mere figments of their imagination or that they have, for their own reasons, manufactured out of thin air.

• For example, they supply a short list of changes made in the text of the Book of Mormon since its first printing (pp. 309–10). Then, once again, they demand that Latter-day Saints conform to their fundamentalist expectations and loudly condemn them when they do not. “It is inconceivable,” they say, “that any bona fide church would permit the alteration of what it truly believed were divine scriptures, let alone alter them itself and then keep such misrepresentations secret. This would represent total irreverence and desecration before God. But this is exactly what the Mormon church has done” (p. 305).<sup>103</sup> They wonder aloud “if respect for things divine means something to Mormon authorities” (p. 311), but quickly answer that rhetorical question in the negative (p. 317). “Mormon scriptures [cannot] be trusted as divine revelation—if for no other reason than the fact that Mormon authorities themselves treat them with great irreverence” (p. 341). Readers are thus encouraged to conclude that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not a “bona fide church,” and that Mormon leaders are neither religiously serious nor sincere. Instead, it is implied that Mormonism is a strange amalgam of irreligious demon worship, whatever that might be, and good old-fashioned financial skulduggery—in proportions that differ according to the particular angle of attack favored by Ankerberg and Weldon at any given moment.

The accusation of “secret” alterations to Latter-day Saint scriptural texts is a very important one to Ankerberg and Weldon. The subtitle to chapter 23 of *Everything* reads “Have Secret Changes Been Made in the Mormon Scriptures?” But this is extraordinarily puzzling, since there seems to be no evidence whatever that the Church is suppressing early texts of the Book of Mormon or hiding the facts about textual variants. Indeed,

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<sup>103</sup> On pp. 318–20, Ankerberg and Weldon attack the integrity of the *History of the Church*, the so-called “Documentary History.” They do not, of course, mention Dean Jessee’s article on the subject, “The Writing of Joseph Smith’s History,” *BYU Studies* 11/4 (Summer 1971): 439–73; cf. Dean C. Jessee, “Has Mormon History Been Deliberately Falsified?” Mormon Miscellaneous Response Series #2, Sandy, UT, 1982; Dean C. Jessee, “The Reliability of Joseph Smith’s History,” *Journal of Mormon History* 3 (1976): 23–46; Howard C. Searle, “Early Mormon Historiography: Writing the History of the Mormons 1830–1858,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1979.



there is a great deal of evidence to the contrary: (1) Wilford Wood's reprint of the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon has been widely available for many years. It is generally present in the Brigham Young University bookstore, and presumably elsewhere, along with reprints of the Book of Commandments and the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants.<sup>104</sup> (2) Numerous scholarly and popular articles on textual and manuscript variations have been published in Latter-day Saint journals.<sup>105</sup> (3) Between 1984 and 1987, the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies produced and published a critical edition of the Book of Mormon that attempted to list all of the textual variants.<sup>106</sup> (4) Deseret Book, the Church's semiofficial publishing house, produced and marketed a reprint of the 1830 edition to commemorate the sesquicentennial of Mormonism in 1980. (5) Professor Royal Skousen of Brigham Young University has, for several years, been preparing a definitive critical edition of the Book of Mormon, complete with textual apparatus listing all variant readings. He has had the full cooperation of the Latter-day Saint leadership in his efforts, and intends that a major volume on the textual history of the Book of Mormon accompany the actual critical edition when it is published. (6) In conjunction with his work, Dr. Skousen actually taught a class on the subject at Brigham Young University during the Fall Term of 1991, and he has discussed his work in print.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Ankerberg and Weldon inform their readers (on pp. 313 and 480) that Wood's books are available from the Tanners—as if the Tanners, those intrepid seekers after truth in the face of devilish Mormon attempts to suppress it—were the only source for them.

<sup>105</sup> See, for example, Dean C. Jessee, "The Original Book of Mormon Manuscript," *BYU Studies* 10/3 (Spring 1970): 259–78; Janet Jenson, "Variations Between Copies of the First Edition of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 13/2 (1973): 214–22; Stan Larson, "Changes in Early Texts of the Book of Mormon," *Ensign* 6 (September 1976): 77–82; Stan Larson, "Textual Variants in Book of Mormon Manuscripts," *Dialogue* 10 (Autumn 1977): 8–30; Stan Larson, "Conjectural Emendation and the Text of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 18/4 (1978): 563–69; George Horton, "Understanding Textual Changes in the Book of Mormon," *Ensign* 13 (December 1983): 24–28; Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 77–79.

<sup>106</sup> *Book of Mormon Critical Text: A Tool for Scholarly Reference* (Provo: F.A.R.M.S., 1984–1987).

<sup>107</sup> See, for example, Royal Skousen, "Towards a Critical Edition of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/1 (1990): 41–69; Royal

Where is the “secrecy”? There is none. Yet Ankerberg and Weldon offer not even a hint of any acquaintance with Latter-day Saint scholarship on this matter. (Remember, there is no Mormon side to any question.)

• “Have we found coins such as the leah, shiblon and shiblum?” There is no evidence, say Ankerberg and Weldon, for the “coins” in the Book of Mormon (pp. 285–86).

It is, alas, quite true that there is no evidence whatsoever for the existence of Book of Mormon coins. Not even in the Book of Mormon itself. The text of the Book of Mormon never mentions the word “coin” or any variant of it. The reference to “Nephite coinage” in the chapter heading to Alma 11 is not part of the original text, and is mistaken. Alma 11 is almost certainly talking about standardized weights of metal—a historical step toward coinage, but not yet the real thing.<sup>108</sup> Genuine coinage was not invented until some years after Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem. And, even then, it scarcely circulated beyond Anatolia and reached Palestine only in the fifth century before Christ. Thus, while an ignorant nineteenth-century con artist might easily have blundered into putting coins in the pockets of his fictional Near Eastern immigrants, the Book of Mormon depicts precisely the monetary situation that it ought to for its claimed time and place of cultural origin.<sup>109</sup> So Latter-day Saint scholars would be as surprised as anybody if we were someday to find a cache of “Book of Mormon coins.”

• Ankerberg and Weldon trumpet the story of the late Thomas Stuart Ferguson, a very popular tale among contemporary anti-Mormons, as an example of an authority on archaeology and a “great defender of the faith” who lost his testimony when he learned the miserable truth about the Book of Mormon (pp. 289–90). “He was head of the Mormon New World Archaeological Foundation, which Brigham Young University

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Skousen, “Piecing Together the Original Manuscript,” *BYU Today* 46/3 (1992): 18–24.

<sup>108</sup> See Hugh Nibley’s discussion in “Howlers in the Book of Mormon,” in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, vol. 8 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1989), 245–46; also Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*, 232–33.

<sup>109</sup> For an authoritative recent survey of the origins of coinage in the Levant, see John W. Betlyon, “Coinage,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:1076–89.



supported with funds for several fruitless archaeological expeditions.”

The errors in their brief account of Ferguson are many. For starters, the work of the New World Archaeological Foundation—which was, incidentally, never intended to deal directly with Book of Mormon questions, and which has always involved the collaboration of prominent non-Mormon researchers—has been far from “fruitless.” Furthermore, Thomas Stuart Ferguson was neither an archaeologist nor a scholar. Ankerberg and Weldon follow what is now, clearly, a rising anti-Mormon tradition in overstating his prominence as an intellectual and, consequently, the significance for others of his sad loss of faith.<sup>110</sup>

• Ankerberg and Weldon pursue a currently popular anti-Mormon line of attack in claiming that the Book of Mormon does not teach a number of distinctly Latter-day Saint doctrines, and, therefore, is not really “Mormon” at all (pp. 292–94).<sup>111</sup> They add a new twist however, when they note that the Doctrine and Covenants declares the Book of Mormon to contain the “fullness” of the gospel (D&C 20:9; 135:3; compare 19:26; 42:12; 18:4; 17:1–6)<sup>112</sup> and that, since this declaration is untrue, not only the Book of Mormon but the Doctrine and Covenants must be rejected by the Latter-day Saints as, by Mormon standards, false scripture.

This is rather clever. But Ankerberg and Weldon’s argument rests here, as so often, on putting words in Mormon mouths. They assert that the Doctrine and Covenants, when it describes the Book of Mormon as containing the “fullness” of the gospel, means by “fulness” (to give the word its actual spelling in Latter-day Saint scripture) the “totality” of Mormon doctrine (p. 294). But this is a highly debatable proposition. Surely, in 1844, when John Taylor wrote Doctrine and Covenants 135, formally announcing the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith, he knew of such distinctively Latter-day Saint doctrines as the plurality of gods, eternal progression, celestial marriage, baptism for the dead, the corporeality of God

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<sup>110</sup> See the statement of John L. Sorenson in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 117–19.

<sup>111</sup> Indeed, they say it “actually denies Mormon doctrines” (p. 294). Amazingly, though, millions of Book-of-Mormon-reading Latter-day Saints have missed this damning fact.

<sup>112</sup> These are the references supplied by Ankerberg and Weldon. They omit mention of Doctrine and Covenants 27:5.

(anthropomorphism), the denial of *ex nihilo* creation, and three degrees of glory.<sup>113</sup> John Taylor was highly intelligent, an acute observer, and had been a central figure in the leadership of the Church for years. Nonetheless, he describes the Book of Mormon—which either does not discuss these doctrines at all or, at the least, does not teach them emphatically or clearly—as containing “the fulness of the everlasting gospel” (D&C 135:3). (Ankerberg and Weldon cite this passage themselves.) The fact that he would do so should suggest to any reasonable observer that John Taylor did not mean, by “fulness,” the “totality” of doctrinal propositions, ritual observances, administrative practices and patterns, and cultural distinctives that make up Mormonism today or even that made up the Mormonism of Nauvoo in the 1840s.<sup>114</sup> Ankerberg and Weldon are thus seen to be assaulting the Latter-day Saints for believing falsely something that they apparently do not believe at all. (Nothing new here.)

What, then, is meant when we speak of the Book of Mormon as containing “the fulness of the gospel”? In several carefully reasoned articles, Noel Reynolds has shown that “gospel,” as the term is used in the Book of Mormon, refers to the means by which a person comes unto Christ and is saved. In its most basic sense, the word does not refer to all of the ordinances and all of the specific doctrines held by the Latter-day Saints, but represents a six-point formula including repentance, baptism, the Holy Ghost, faith, endurance to the end, and eternal life. These teachings are clearly set out in the Book of Mormon.<sup>115</sup>

While it is quite true that, as Ankerberg and Weldon maintain, several distinctively Latter-day Saint doctrines are not clearly discussed in the Book of Mormon, this is not necessarily to admit, however, that there is no allusion to such doctrines at

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<sup>113</sup> These are among the doctrines listed by Ankerberg and Weldon (on p. 293) as missing from the Book of Mormon.

<sup>114</sup> It is interesting to note that Webster's 1828 dictionary offers as its second meaning for “fulness” “the state of abounding or being in great plenty; abundance.” Only afterwards, as the third meaning, does it speak of “completeness; the state of a thing in which nothing is wanted; perfection.”

<sup>115</sup> See Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets,” *BYU Studies* 31/3 (Summer 1991): 31–50; Noel B. Reynolds, “Gospel of Jesus Christ,” in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:556–60; Noel B. Reynolds, “How to ‘Come unto Christ,’” *Ensign* 22/9 (1992): 7–13.



all. Thus, for instance, it seems to me that 3 Nephi 28:10 contains a subtle but unmistakable allusion to a doctrine of human deification. And, just a few verses later, at 3 Nephi 28:13–16, we find what might well be an analogy to Latter-day Saint temple ritual, which takes the form of an ascension rite and which likewise involves the communication of matters that are not to be publicly taught or discussed. Several more such examples could be given. But there is no need for these doctrines to be explicitly discussed in the Book of Mormon, for the Nephite record itself repeatedly teaches that, after the believer has come to Christ and received the Holy Ghost, important further revelations will follow.<sup>116</sup> It consistently points beyond itself to things that are not “lawful” to write or to utter, thus teaching us that there are other doctrines not contained within its pages.<sup>117</sup>

- Following the most venerable traditions of anti-Mormonism, Ankerberg and Weldon cite Jacob 2:24–29 and Ether 10:5 to argue that the Book of Mormon condemns polygamy, and, hence, that nineteenth-century plural marriage is denounced by the Latter-day Saints’ own scriptures (p. 410). Like their predecessors, though, they carefully omit any mention of Jacob 2:30, which destroys their argument.

- Ankerberg and Weldon wonder “how significant portions of the gold plates ended up containing perfect King James English a thousand years before King James English existed.”<sup>118</sup> Actually, of course, they don’t wonder at all. They think they have a powerful argument here, so they press the point home with an unanswerable question: “If the Book of Mormon was actually finished in A.D. 400, how could it contain such extensive citations from a book not to be written for another twelve hundred years?” (pp. 280–81; 310–11). The triumphant guffaws are almost audible. Ankerberg and Weldon quote the Tanners, who say, “The only reasonable explanation is

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<sup>116</sup> As at 2 Nephi 28:26–30; Alma 12:9–11; 3 Nephi 26:9–10; Mormon 8:12; Ether 4:4–10, 13.

<sup>117</sup> As at 2 Nephi 27:7–11, 21; 3 Nephi 26:11, 16, 18; 27:23; 28:13–14; Ether 13:13.

<sup>118</sup> Incidentally, Royal Skousen, an internationally known linguist and the foremost living authority on the text of the Book of Mormon, disputes the common claim that the 1830 English Book of Mormon was written in “perfect King James English.” In conversation, he notes many elements of the book’s language that seem rather to resemble Tyndale’s earlier translation, or even Middle English, as well as elements that appear to reflect a non-English original.

that the author of the Book of Mormon had the King James Version of the Bible. And since this version did not appear until A.D. 1611, the Book of Mormon could not have been written prior to that time" (p. 281).

But this is a bizarre argument even by permissive anti-Mormon standards. If the language and style of a translation were always already present in the original text, we would have to wonder how, in the early seventeenth century, Genesis ended up containing perfect King James English several *thousand* years before King James English existed! This should not be a very subtle point, but, since it seems to have caused several generations of anti-Mormons major fits, I will devote a few more lines to its explanation. Consider the following simple Arabic sentence, transliterated from the seventh-century Muslim scripture known as the Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān: *iyyāka naʿbudu wa iyyāka nastaʿīn*.<sup>119</sup> Confronted with this sentence, a translator has virtually innumerable options. He might translate it into German, for instance ("Dir dienen wir, und dich bitten wir um Hilfe"). Or he might put it into Chinese, or into Tagalog, or into Swahili, or into classical Greek, or modern Greek, or Navajo, or into whatever language or languages he commands. Let us suppose, however, that our translator is a native speaker of English, wanting to put this Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ānic passage into his own tongue. He might opt for a rather formal, archaic, "scriptural" type of language ("Thou art he whom we worship, and thou art he unto whom we turn for help"), or he might choose, instead, a less formal, more modern, more conversational style ("You're the one we worship, and you're the one we ask for help"). Any one of these translations would be accurate. But the style of the translation, the kind of language employed, is entirely up to the translator. A translation of the Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān modeled after the King James Bible like Sale's would certainly not imply that there was King James English in the original Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān, any more than a German translation would suggest that the Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān was initially written in German. And does it make even the slightest degree of sense to argue, since modern German translations of the Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān do indisputably exist, and since "modern" German cannot really be said to exist before Martin Luther, that there was no seventh-century Arabic Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān? That the Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān must actually have been written, in German, sometime during or after the Protestant

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<sup>119</sup> Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān 1:5. I deliberately choose, as my example, a non-biblical text.



Reformation? If, for whatever reason, our translator chooses to follow earlier renderings of certain passages, does this prove that no original Arabic text exists? (This would raise serious questions about the authenticity of the Bible, since the King James translators made extensive use of the earlier versions of William Tyndale, Miles Coverdale, and others.)

Yet this is precisely the kind of argument advanced by Ankerberg and Weldon. "The 'reformed Egyptian' Book of Mormon," they reveal on p. 322, "even has the French word, 'Adieu' (Jacob 7:27)." Therefore, they imply, Latter-day Saints face a dilemma: Either we must admit that there was French on the plates, a thousand years or so before French came into existence, or we must admit that the Book of Mormon is a late forgery. How absurd! Had Joseph Smith been so inclined, he could have translated the Nephite word—whatever it was—as "shalom," "ciao," or "sayonara." "Adieu" was simply a word in his vocabulary—and a word, by the way, that so unsophisticated a young man as Joseph Smith was might not even have known to be French. (Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language* includes "adieu," as does the 1980 *Oxford American Dictionary*.) What difference does it make if Joseph Smith used "adieu" to render what he found on the plates? If, instead, he had said "good-bye," would that have proved that there was English on the plates? If so, we don't need to read until Jacob 7:27 in order to find clear disproof of the Book of Mormon's antiquity. The very first word in 1 Nephi 1:1 would serve just as well: The first-person, singular English pronoun "I" certainly did not exist in 600 B.C.

Again, Ankerberg and Weldon are much amused by the fact that the English translation of 3 Nephi 9:18 features the Greek words "Alpha and Omega." What, they chortle, is Greek doing in the supposedly Hebrew Book of Mormon? They don't seem to realize that "Alpha and Omega" may be a perfectly good translation of original phrasing, found on the plates, that contained no Greek. So, likewise, it could serve as a fine translation of the common Arabic phrase *al-bidāya wa-al-nihāya*, "the beginning and the end." So, too, "A and Z" would be a perfectly legitimate translation of the Greek "Alpha and Omega" without implying even for a moment that English letters occurred in the Greek New Testament.

### Alleged Absurdities

Ankerberg and Weldon provide a lengthy but entirely unoriginal list of supposed “howlers” in the Book of Mormon. Let us examine a few of these.

• “How is it possible,” Ankerberg and Weldon ask, “that Jewish [*sic*] writers between 600 B.C. and A.D. 421 would discuss the social and religious issues unique to nineteenth-century Christian America?” (p. 278; cf. 279). They then cite, as examples of these “issues unique to nineteenth-century Christian America,” Fawn Brodie’s citation of Alexander Campbell’s famous list of “great controversies” that had been “discussed in New York for the last ten years”: “infant baptism, ordination, the trinity, regeneration, repentance, justification, the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation, fasting, penance, church government, religious experience, the call to the ministry, the general resurrection, eternal punishment, who may baptize, and even the question of Freemasonry, Republican government and the rights of man” (p. 279).

But, apart from “Freemasonry, Republican government and the rights of man,” there is not an item on Campbell’s list that is “unique to nineteenth-century Christian America.” (Actually, even those three are not precisely unique.) Indeed, for many of the issues Campbell raises, it would be difficult to find a century of the Christian era in which such matters were *not* discussed. As for Campbell’s last three items, I do not know of a discussion of “the rights of man” in the Book of Mormon in anything even remotely like a nineteenth-century sense. Nor does “Republican government” appear to be a feature of Nephite—much less Jaredite!—society.<sup>120</sup> And I have argued elsewhere that Freemasonry does not appear in the Book of Mormon.<sup>121</sup>

• “In Helaman 14:20,” report Ankerberg and Weldon, “the darkness over the face of the land is said to have lasted for three days instead of the biblical three hours (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33)” (p. 322).

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<sup>120</sup> For the response to this issue of an eminent American historian, currently at Columbia University, see Richard L. Bushman, “The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution,” in Reynolds, *Book of Mormon Authorship*, 189–211.

<sup>121</sup> Daniel C. Peterson, “Notes on ‘Gadianton Masonry,’” in Ricks and Hamblin, eds., *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, 174–224.



They want their readers to see a contradiction here. They do not mention that the Book of Mormon's claim of three days of darkness<sup>122</sup> is advanced only with regard to the Western Hemisphere, and that the New Testament's description of three hours of darkness pertains only to the Eastern Hemisphere. There is no contradiction, because the two books are describing two different situations. No Latter-day Saint has ever claimed, on the basis of the Book of Mormon, that the darkness in the Old World "lasted for three days instead of the biblical three hours." No, that false claim is made on our behalf by our helpful anti-Mormon friends.

- And they immediately try it again. "In Alma 46:15 it teaches that the name Christian was taken in the Americas in 73 B.C. whereas in Acts 11:26, 'The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch' Syria around A.D. 50" (p. 322).

Once more, though, Alma's narrative is discussing the situation in the New World, while the events related in the Acts of the Apostles take place in the Old World. So far as the author of Acts knew, and so far as his story was concerned, it was indeed in Antioch that the disciples were first termed "Christians." Only the most rigid fundamentalist would find this problematic.<sup>123</sup> No Latter-day Saint ever has.

- "The Book of Mormon teaches that Jesus Christ was born at Jerusalem (Alma 7:10). Of course, the Bible teaches He was born at Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1)." However, since Bethlehem is five or six miles from Jerusalem, and a distinct town, "Alma 7:10 is clearly a false prophecy" (p. 364; cf. 353).<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. Russell H. Ball, "An Hypothesis concerning the Three Days of Darkness among the Nephites," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (Spring 1993): 107-23.

<sup>123</sup> This objection, with the one immediately preceding, demonstrates yet again Ankerberg and Weldon's weak grasp of logic and their difficulty with the concept of "contradiction." See above, at n. 23.

<sup>124</sup> This silly argument has been employed by anti-Mormons since 1833. Alexander Campbell, *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon* (1832), 13; Origin Bacheleer, *Mormonism Exposed Internally and Externally* (1838), 14, 26; Tyler Parsons, *Mormon Fanaticism Exposed* (1841), 9; J. B. Turner, *Mormonism in All Ages* (1842), 193; John Thomas, *Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Mormons* (1849), 4; Andrew Hepburn, *An Exposition of the Blasphemous Doctrines and Delusions . . .* (1852), 13; John Haynes, *The Book of Mormon Examined* (1853), 16; Hepburn, *Mormonism Exploded* (1855), 39; John Hyde Jr.,

I confess that I have never quite seen the point of this hoary old anti-Mormon chestnut.<sup>125</sup> After all, from across the ocean, the distance between Jerusalem and Bethlehem would hardly have seemed significant to a Nephite.<sup>126</sup> I myself, when

*Mormonism: Its Leaders and Designs* (1857), 233; William Sheldon, *Mormonism Examined* (1876), 10; A. G. Hobbs, *Did the Book of Mormon Come from God?* (1954), 16; Arthur Budvarson, *The Book of Mormon: True or False?* (1961), 15; Jack Free, *Mormonism and Inspiration* (1962), 118; Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1965), 166–67; Roy Paterson, *Meeting the Mormons* (1965), 42; Arthur Budvarson, *A Rebuttal to "The Problems of the Book of Mormon"* (1966), 26–28; Gordon Lewis, *The Bible, the Christian, and Latter-day Saints* (1966), 11–12; Larry Davenport, *Mormonism and the Bible: Does it Measure Up?* (no date), 20–21; Edmund Gruss, *What Every Mormon Should Know* (1975), 53; Charles Crane, *The Bible and Mormon Scriptures Compared* (1976), 76; Roy Lanier, *Mormon Doctrine* (1976), 45; Marvin Cowan, *Mormon Claims Answered* (1977), 35; William Mitchell, *A Christian Looks at Mormonism* (1977), 11; Floyd McElveen, *The Mormon Illusion* (1977), 34; W. N. Jackson, *Is the Book of Mormon from God?* (1977), 4; Walter Martin, *The Maze of Mormonism* (1978), 327; Latayne Co. Scott, *The Mormon Mirage* (1979), 86; Anonymous, "Witnessing Aid for Christians to the Mormons" (November 1979): 8; Wally Tope, *Why Should I Pray about the Book of Mormon?* (n.d.), 2; D.B., *Mormonism: Of God or Men?* (1981), 10; Loftes Tryk, *The Best Kept Secrets of the Book of Mormon* (1988), 72; Ray Zuck, *Letter to a Mormon Elder* (1990), 2; Anonymous, "Contradictions: Bible & Book of Mormon" (March 1991): 6; Eric Johnson, "A Tale of Two Cities" (Winter 1991): 4; Weldon Langfield, *The Truth about Mormonism* (1991), 53; Bill McKeever, "Problems in the Land of Jerusalem" (Winter 1992): 3–4; John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Everything You Wanted to Know about Mormonism* (1992), 353. I would like to thank Matthew Roper for research on this bibliography.

<sup>125</sup> William J. Hamblin, Matthew Roper, and John Gee offered many helpful suggestions in regard to this section.

<sup>126</sup> Geographical precision seems to have been a secondary matter even for some biblical figures living in Palestine. Consider the case of Cleopas, who, with a friend, walked with the resurrected Christ along the road to Emmaus. "Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem," he asked his anonymous companion, "and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?" "What things?" the Savior asked. Cleopas and his friend replied that they were referring to the condemnation and crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. (See Luke 24:13–20.) But the place of crucifixion, Calvary or Golgotha, was not *in* the city of Jerusalem. Rather, it was outside the wall (John 19:20).



in the Middle East or Europe (or, often, even in Utah), routinely answer "Los Angeles" when asked where I am originally from, although that answer is literally untrue, and the more accurate reply would be "Pasadena" (birthplace), or "San Gabriel" (residence through high school), or even "Whittier" (current residence of my parents). And no Latter-day Saint has ever, to my knowledge, claimed or believed because of Alma 7:10 that Jesus was not born in Bethlehem. Nevertheless, because this objection continues to be so popular among certain critics of the Book of Mormon, it probably deserves some attention. However, since Ankerberg and Weldon offer virtually nothing in the way of coherent argument, it will occasionally be necessary—in order to have an interlocutor worthy of such attention—to draw on the writings of other anti-Mormons.

Why did Alma not give a more precise location for the birth of Jesus? Probably because he was talking to people some five centuries removed from any direct knowledge of the geography of Judea. Bethlehem is never mentioned in the Book of Mormon, and its exact location would almost certainly have been unknown to the average nonscholarly Nephite. We know that texts from the Bible were available to the Nephites, but we cannot be certain what they were. Furthermore, copies of the scriptures are unlikely to have been widely distributed among ordinary people since, without the printing press, they would simply have been too expensive. A prophetic reference to a small unfamiliar village near Jerusalem would, therefore, likely have been meaningless to Alma's audience. Jerusalem, by contrast, was well known and frequently mentioned.

Let us illustrate the situation with a hypothetical member of the Brigham Young University faculty, temporarily assigned to duty at the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies. If, upon his return, he were to state, "I lived for six months in Ramat Eshkol"—a perfectly plausible claim, since the university has, in fact, maintained faculty apartments in Ramat Eshkol—how many people would know the place to which he referred? Very few. On the other hand, if he were to say, "I lived six months in Jerusalem," everyone would understand. But Ramat Eshkol is a suburb of Jerusalem, several miles to the north, and technically not part of the city itself. Thus, to those familiar with the microgeography of Jerusalem and Israel, Ramat Eshkol would be a meaningful geographical designator. To those only vaguely familiar with Israel, however, Jerusalem would be much more meaningful. Therefore, since those ignorant of Jerusalem's mi-

crogeography significantly outnumber those who know it (especially in North America), our hypothetical professor will usually say that he lived in Jerusalem. Does this somehow make him a liar? Or, more drastically, are we to assume—paralleling the methods of the anti-Mormons—that, because he says he lived in Jerusalem instead of Ramat Eshkol, he never lived in Israel at all, and, indeed, that he doesn't even exist?

It is worth noting here that the geographical details in the Book of Mormon relating to Palestine and the Near East are indeed vague and sparse, while those relating to the New World are complex, precise, consistent, and detailed.<sup>127</sup> This poses a problem for both fundamentalist anti-Mormons and secular environmentalist critics. If the Book of Mormon were in fact a nineteenth-century forgery, we would expect geographical precision to be reflected in terminology relating to Palestinian and biblical geography, which Joseph Smith could have plagiarized from the Bible. We would expect vagueness to be found in the geography of the New World, which Joseph Smith had to invent. In fact, however, just the opposite is true.

Furthermore, to suggest that Joseph Smith knew the precise location of Jesus' baptism by John ("in Bethabara, beyond Jordan"; 1 Nephi 10:9), but hadn't a clue about the famous town of Christ's birth, is so improbable as to be ludicrous.<sup>128</sup> Do anti-Mormons seriously mean to suggest that the Book of Mormon's Bible-drenched author or authors missed one of the most obvious facts about the most popular story in the Bible—something known to every child and to every singer of Christmas carols?<sup>129</sup> Do they intend to say that a clever fraud

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<sup>127</sup> See Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*; Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events*; Clark, "A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies."

<sup>128</sup> It may be objected that, if Bethlehem were too obscure to be worth mentioning, the even more obscure Bethabara should likewise be absent from the Book of Mormon. I suspect that the reason for Bethabara's inclusion lies in the fact that the prophecy that mentions it is given through Lehi, a resident of the Jerusalem area throughout his life (1 Nephi 1:4), and recorded by Nephi, who was also a native of Judea, during a time when memories of the Old World were still fresh in both the two men and their immediate audience. Alma, of course, lived in the New World half a millennium later.

<sup>129</sup> See Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990), for a recent assault on the Book of Mormon, the argument of which rests



who could write a book displaying so wide an array of subtle and authentic Near Eastern and biblical cultural and literary traits as the Book of Mormon does was nonetheless so stupid as to claim, to a Bible-reading public, that Jesus was born in the city of Jerusalem? As one anti-Mormon author has pointed out, "Every schoolboy and schoolgirl knows Christ was born in Bethlehem."<sup>130</sup> Exactly! It is virtually certain, therefore, that Alma 7:10 was as foreign to Joseph Smith's preconceptions as it is to those of the average anti-Mormon zealot. He is hardly likely to have twisted the Christmas story in so obvious a way, to have raised so noticeable a red flag, if he were trying to perpetrate a deception.

However, although nobody would ever learn it from Ankerberg and Weldon, the Book of Mormon's prophecy that Christ would be born "at Jerusalem which is the land of our fathers" fits remarkably well with what we now know to have been ancient usage. They seem, as usual, to know nothing of previous Latter-day Saint writing on this subject.<sup>131</sup> Yet, far from casting doubt upon the authenticity of the book, the statement in Alma 7:10 represents a striking bull's-eye.

"Many excuses have been made," says one dedicated critic of the Church, "as to why Joseph Smith claimed Jesus was born 'at Jerusalem' and not Bethlehem as the Bible describes."<sup>132</sup> I

heavily upon the debatable assumption that Joseph Smith knew the Bible extremely well and in extraordinary detail. I find it absolutely impossible to reconcile such alleged mastery of biblical detail with the dumb mistake that the Prophet is supposed to have committed with respect to Christ's birthplace. Critics of the Book of Mormon really cannot have it both ways.

<sup>130</sup> Weldon Langfield, *The Truth about Mormonism: A Former Adherent Analyzes the LDS Faith* (Bakersfield: Weldon Langfield Publications, 1991), 53. For a critique of Langfield's book, see Matthew Roper's essay in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 4* (1992): 78–92.

<sup>131</sup> See, for instance, B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909), 3:481–82; Sidney B. Sperry, *Answers to Book of Mormon Questions* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967), 131–36, 207–8; D. Kelly Ogden, "Why does the Book of Mormon say that Jesus would be born at Jerusalem?" *Ensign* 14 (August 1984): 51–52; Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 6–7; Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 100–102; Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 170–72.

<sup>132</sup> Bill McKeever, "Problems in 'the Land of' Jerusalem," *Mormonism Researched* (Winter 1992): 3. A longer, unpublished article on the same subject, bearing the same title, was produced by McKeever in

know of nobody making “excuses.” Nor do I know of any Latter-day Saint who would agree that the Book of Mormon teaches that the Savior was born in the city of Jerusalem, and not Bethlehem. Alma 7:10 does not even *mention* the city of Jerusalem. What we have here, as happens so very frequently, is anti-Mormons telling us what we believe and informing us, over our strong protests, what our sacred texts really mean. It is enemies of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who insist that Alma 7:10 contradicts the Bible. Latter-day Saints are quite content to believe both Alma and the New Testament, and to see them in harmony. Happily, the evidence is overwhelmingly on our side.

Bethlehem, it seems, belonged to a district known as “the land of Jerusalem,” of which Jerusalem proper was the capital or “mother-city” (*metropolis*). Such things were hardly unknown in antiquity. “City and state often have the same name in the Ancient Orient, although distinct entities.”<sup>133</sup> Thus, for instance, northern Syria’s “Carchemish” was both city and land.<sup>134</sup> Egyptian texts of the Twelfth Dynasty, dating from the nineteenth century B.C., likewise seem to suggest that the ancient Palestinian city of Shechem was surrounded by a “land” of the same name, as do the so-called “Amarna letters,” which date to approximately 1400 B.C.<sup>135</sup> The Amarna letters also allude to “a town of the land of Jerusalem, Bit-Lahmi by name,” which the illustrious W. F. Albright regarded as “an almost certain reference to the town of Bethlehem.”<sup>136</sup> This is interesting evidence,

1992, in conjunction with one Eric Johnson. When referred to, this unpublished version will be distinguished from the published article by Johnson’s name and by the designation “Long Text.”

<sup>133</sup> K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1966), 68 n. 63.

<sup>134</sup> Kitchen, *loc. cit.*

<sup>135</sup> See Walter Harrelson, “Shechem in Extra-Biblical References,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 20 (1957): 4, 6–7.

<sup>136</sup> See James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 1:274; also Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, eds., *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1977), map 39. Hugh Nibley drew our attention to the Amarna letters years ago. See Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 100–102. Nibley’s references are to the Amarna letters, tablets 287:25 = “the land of the city of Jerusalem ([a-]mur mat u-ru-sa-lim an-n[i-]ta)”; 46, 61, 63 = “lands [matat] of Jerusalem”; 290:15–16, discusses “a



which goes some distance to establishing the plausibility of Alma's prophecy since it give us a glimpse of an ancient administrative arrangement in the vicinity of Jerusalem. It shows, from an ancient perspective, that it was possible to conceptualize the regions surrounding a major city, including its dependent villages, as "the land of" that city. And it demonstrates, furthermore, that Bethlehem itself was, at least at one point, anciently regarded as a part of Jerusalem's "land," exactly as in the Book of Mormon.

However, one vocal critic of the Book of Mormon, Bill McKeever, contends that the Amarna letters are far too old to be relevant. "It would," he declares, "be like using a letter from King George III to prove the United States could still be rightly called the colonies."<sup>137</sup> McKeever overstates his case, but his demand that we look at the Bible is not altogether without merit.<sup>138</sup>

city of the land of Jerusalem, whose name is *bit-ninib*." Samuel A. B. Mercer, *The Tell el-Amarna Tablets* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1939), 722 n. L16, speculated that it might be possible to read this as "Bethlehem." Transliteration and translation can be found on pp. 710–11, 722 of Mercer's book. A more recent translation is now William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992).

<sup>137</sup> McKeever, "Problems in 'the Land of' Jerusalem," 4. McKeever's claim that Nibley left out "very pertinent information" concerning the origin and date of the Amarna letters (p. 3) is, by the way, manifestly false. Nibley accurately describes the nature of the Amarna letters on p. 469 n. 16, of *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, referencing material in his original discussion on p. 101: "The Amarna Letters are the actual documents of the official correspondence between the Egyptian Government and the rulers of the various principalities of Palestine and Syria about 1400 B.C., at the very time the Hebrews were entering Palestine. They were found on clay tablets at El-Amarna on the middle Nile in 1887." In this passage, Nibley refers to everything McKeever claims he "left out," including: the date "1400 B.C.," that they were by "Palestinian chieftain[s]," that they were "not of Hebrew ancestry," and that they were written to "the Pharaoh of Egypt." (See McKeever, p. 3.) Perhaps McKeever should not have "invite[d] [his] readers to check [his] sources for context accuracy" (p. 3). Certainly he has not accurately presented the context of Nibley's argument.

<sup>138</sup> His own examination of the biblical evidence, however, is largely without merit. First of all, in order to show that the term "land of Jerusalem" was not current in biblical times, he must examine every text and every utterance from that period. But most texts and virtually all human utterances vanish without a trace, even from the modern period. He must

What do we learn from the history of Israel during the biblical period? Anti-Mormons claim, correctly, that the precise phrase "land of Jerusalem" never occurs in the Bible.<sup>139</sup> However, this is almost certainly not as important a fact as they believe it to be. Jerusalem played a central administrative and political role from the reign of King David in the tenth century B.C. down to the period of the Babylonian exile—i.e., to roughly the time of Lehi and the departure of the Mulckites. David's successor, King Solomon, divided his kingdom into twelve administrative districts, largely for purposes of taxation, with each one governed from an administrative center.<sup>140</sup> One of those districts included both Bethlehem and Jerusalem, with the latter serving as district capital.<sup>141</sup> During the reign of Hezekiah, between 716 and 687 B.C., Solomon's twelve districts were consolidated into four, but Jerusalem "did double duty as the royal and district capital."<sup>142</sup> Using the Hebrew word *migrash*, meaning the open agricultural or pastoral land surrounding a city, rather than *eretz*, which refers to land or ground in general, the prophet Ezekiel speaks of the area immediately surrounding Jerusalem (Ezekiel 48:15).<sup>143</sup>

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prove a negative, but, since almost none of the relevant ancient evidence survives, he can never reach certainty. Moreover, when he tries to establish a "biblical" usage-pattern for the phrase "at Jerusalem," his statistically problematic five samples extend from the originally Hebrew text of 1 Kings 12:27 to the originally Greek text of John 10:22, as if there were some "scriptural" style of preposition-use that transcends difference not only of languages but of language *families*, and that necessarily remains unchanged over the course of many centuries. See McKeever and Johnson, "Problems in 'the Land of' Jerusalem" (Long Text), 3. On pp. 4–6, McKeever and Johnson show remarkable ability to read their assumptions into the evidence of the Book of Mormon, taking a number of texts as supporting their position which actually do nothing of the kind.

139 For example, McKeever, "Problems in 'the Land of' Jerusalem," 3–4.

140 John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 221–22; Yohanan Aharoni, *The Archaeology of the Land of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 258–59.

141 See A. F. Rainey, "The Biblical Shephelah of Judah," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 251 (Summer 1983): 8.

142 Aharoni, *The Archaeology of the Land of Israel*, 259.

143 See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Lafayette, IN: Associated Publishers, 1981), 117. Although the



Jerusalem enjoyed manifestly higher status than other cities in the immediate area. It was not, contrary to Bill McKeever, "just a city within a kingdom."<sup>144</sup> Thus, for instance, Babylonian texts describe Jerusalem as "*the city*," *par excellence*, of Judah: "In the month of Kislimu, the King of Akkad called up his army, marched against the city of Judah [Jerusalem] and seized the town."<sup>145</sup> Assyrian provincial terminology had generally used the name of the capital of a province to designate that province as a whole<sup>146</sup>—a practice which would therefore have been familiar to Lehi<sup>147</sup>—and such usage appears to have continued among the Babylonians.<sup>148</sup> Whatever its origins, however, the practice of naming an area after its leading city was obviously widespread in the ancient Near East. And if Jerusalem was "the city of Judah," would it have been unreasonable to regard the region of Judah as "the land of Jerusalem"? This is precisely the same ambiguity between land and capital city that is displayed in the Book of Mormon, in a record that dates from precisely the time of Nephi. And Lehi's contemporary, the prophet Jeremiah, describing the siege of

actual phrase *migrash Yerushalayim* does not occur, the context of the passage shows that it refers to the *migrash* of Jerusalem.

<sup>144</sup> The phrase is from McKeever, "Problems in 'the Land of Jerusalem,'" 4.

<sup>145</sup> Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, 1:203; cf. James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 564. This occurred in year 7 of Nebuchadrezzar (= 598–597 B.C.). For the original text, see A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1975), 102, line 12.

<sup>146</sup> Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, 2d ed., translated by A. F. Rainey (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 374–77, with additional references found in Aharoni's notes.

<sup>147</sup> We do not know Lehi's age "in the first year of the reign of Zedekiah" (1 Nephi 14 = 597 B.C.; see Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 2d ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: Academie/Zondervan, 1983], 190–91). However, since he had several adult sons at this time, we can probably conclude that he was at least in his late thirties. This would place his birth *at the latest* around 640 B.C., and probably earlier. Assyrian power in Palestine and Syria collapsed about 616 B.C., meaning that Lehi, an adult of at least twenty-five years at the time of the fall of Assyria, would have been familiar with the usage of that period.

<sup>148</sup> Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, 408–11.

Jerusalem, says that Nebuchadnezzar's armies fought "against Jerusalem and all its surrounding towns" (Jeremiah 34:1; New International Version)—by which he apparently means the other cities and towns of Judah (Jeremiah 34:7). In this, Jeremiah was entirely consistent with common biblical usage, according to which the name "Jerusalem" was often used to designate the entire southern kingdom.<sup>149</sup>

Other cities, too, had their surrounding "lands," named after them. Samaria, for instance, was often used as a designation for the entire northern kingdom of Israel even though, strictly speaking, it was only the name of the royal city that had been founded by Omri in the early ninth century B.C. (1 Kings 16:24). The Bible speaks of "cities of Samaria."<sup>150</sup> Thus, when we read of "Ahab king of Samaria," we are to understand him as the monarch of the northern kingdom as a whole, not merely as the glorified mayor of its largest urban center. Jeremiah 31:5 even refers to "the mountains of Samaria." Similarly, Ephraim possessed the city of "Tappuah," but Manasseh owned the territory of the same name (Joshua 17:8)—which the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* quite correctly terms "the land of Tappuah."<sup>151</sup> The town of "Tob" was surrounded, biblically, by "the land of Tob" (Judges 11:3).<sup>152</sup> "Mizpah" or "Mizpeh" was "the name of several towns in Palestine and neighboring lands."<sup>153</sup>

And such usage extended beyond the boundaries of Hebrew settlement. The great Syrian city of Damascus, for instance, seems to have possessed a "wilderness" (1 Kings 19:15). In the so-called "Damascus Rule" or "Zadokite Document," part of the Dead Sea Scrolls, reference is made twice to "the land of Damascus."<sup>154</sup> So, too, the Canaanite city of Hazor seems to have been surrounded by a land of the same name.<sup>155</sup> "Tema," in Arabia, was both land and city (Isaiah

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<sup>149</sup> See, for example, 2 Kings 21:13; Isaiah 10:10–11; Ezekiel 23:4; Micah 1:1, 5.

<sup>150</sup> See 1 Kings 13:32; 2 Kings 17:24, 26; 23:19; Ezra 4:16.

<sup>151</sup> *IDB* 4:517; cf. Paul J. Achtemeier, ed., *Harper's Bible Dictionary* [hereafter *HBD*] (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 1017.

<sup>152</sup> *IDB* 4:657.

<sup>153</sup> *IDB* 3:407.

<sup>154</sup> Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 2d ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 6:102–3.

<sup>155</sup> Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, 68.



21:14), as, apparently, was “Ur of the Chaldees.”<sup>156</sup> Lehi’s great contemporary, the prophet Jeremiah, knows “the land of Babylon” (Jeremiah 50:28; 51:29), as well as the famous city from which that land had taken its name. And when Abraham “sojourned in Gerar” (Genesis 20:1), one eminent scholar assures us, this was “obviously in the territory so named, not the walled city itself.”<sup>157</sup> The “cities of the plain” are known to every reader of the Bible. Yet the Savior himself can allude to “the land of Sodom and Gomorrha” (Matthew 10:15; cf. 11:24). “Hamath” was an important town on the Orontes River in Syria. “Riblah” was also an ancient Syrian town. However, at several points in the Hebrew Bible we read of “Riblah in the land of Hamath”—of, that is, one city which is in “the land of” another city.<sup>158</sup> This usage precisely parallels Latter-day Saint contentions that the city of Bethlehem could well be described in Hebrew terminology as being in “the land of” Jerusalem. Indeed, the phrase “land of their cities” (Heb. *eret̄ šd̄ārāw*) occurs in 1 Kings 8:37, implying that it was seen in Hebrew as a generic grammatical form.

Thus, although the actual phrase “land of Jerusalem” is not itself found in the Bible, it is perfectly acceptable biblical usage for the region around a major city, including smaller towns, to be referred to as “the land of” that city.<sup>159</sup> Vocal anti-Mormons go on, however, to infer incorrectly that the existence of this phrase in the Book of Mormon somehow disproves the book’s historicity.<sup>160</sup> Their conclusion is unjustified for at least two

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<sup>156</sup> *IDB* 4:533; on “Ur,” see John A. Tvedtnes and Ross T. Christensen, *Ur of the Chaldeans: Increasing Evidence on the Birthplace of Abraham and the Original Homeland of the Hebrews* (Provo: Society for Early Historic Archaeology, 1985), 8–9.

<sup>157</sup> Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, 68 n. 63.

<sup>158</sup> 2 Kings 23:33; 25:21; Jeremiah 39:5; 52:9, 27; *IDB* 2:516; 4:78; *HBD*, 369, 871.

<sup>159</sup> Clearly, Bill McKeever’s claim that, “except for a few references to city-states, there is only one possible city [Babylon] cited in conjunction with the phrase ‘land of’ ” (“Problems in ‘the Land of’ Jerusalem,” 4) is, to say the least of it, mistaken. Likewise, his claim that “the expression ‘land of the city of’ is a Hittite expression” (p. 3, quoting William S. LaSor), is both disputed and irrelevant. The fact that a particular grammatical form in the Akkadian texts of the Amarna letters may ultimately have derived from Hittite is irrelevant, since the phrase occurs in the Bible independently, and is thus also a legitimate Hebrew grammatical expression.

<sup>160</sup> Anti-Mormons frequently claim that the Book of Mormon is plagiarizing the Bible whenever it uses biblical phraseology—this is one of

reasons: (1) Alma's reference to a "land" of Jerusalem seems, in fact, to be entirely plausible in the light of biblical and general ancient usage. (2) The real question is not whether the phrase is used in the Bible, but how it is used in the Book of Mormon. If anti-Mormons want to claim that the Amarna letters are too old to be relevant to Alma 7:10, they can hardly claim that the Hebrew Bible is primary or contemporary evidence. It must not be forgotten, in the consideration of this issue, that Alma was writing sometime in the first century B.C. In other words, more than five centuries separated him and his people and their habits of speech from their ancestral homeland and its characteristic expressions. This is plenty of time for linguistic change to accumulate, as anyone can testify who has tried to read Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in their original Middle English. The Nephite language, as I have already pointed out, seems to have been unique:

And now, behold, we have written this record according to our knowledge, in the characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech. And if our plates had been sufficiently large we should have written in Hebrew; but the Hebrew hath been altered by us also; and if we could have written in Hebrew, behold, ye would have had no imperfection in our record. But the Lord knoweth the things which we have written, and also that *none other people knoweth our language*; and because that none other people knoweth our language, therefore he hath prepared means for the interpretation thereof. (Mormon 9:32–34; emphasis added)

The most reliable way to determine what a given phrase means in the Book of Mormon, therefore, is to look at the Book of Mormon. To understand a perplexing expression in Shakespeare, we first study his writing. Only if that fails do we look at other texts. And we would have to be pretty desperate

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the basic assumptions of the Tanners' *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*—but then declare that, wherever the Book of Mormon uses phraseology without biblical parallel, it has clearly discredited itself as an ancient document. Using this flawed methodology, the authenticity of the Book of Mormon can never really be tested, since the questions are framed in such a manner as to ensure a negative conclusion.



before we turned for guidance to the writings of John Milton, or Chaucer, or *Beowulf*.

It emerges from an examination of the data that the Book of Mormon routinely refers to "lands" that both surround and bear the names of their chief cities. We read, for instance, of the lands and cities of "Ammonihah," "Gideon," "Helam," "Jashon," "Lehi," "Lehi-Nephi," "Manti," "Morianton," "Moroni," "Mulek," "Nehor," "Nephihah," "Noah," "Shem," and "Shilom."<sup>161</sup> The cities and lands of "Bountiful" and "Desolation" play a central role in Nephite history.<sup>162</sup> So, too, did the city and land of "Nephi."<sup>163</sup> Thus, Amalickiah "marched with his armies . . . to the land of Nephi, to the city of Nephi, which was the chief city" (Alma 47:20). Notice, incidentally, that Alma had to specify that his prophecy referred to "Jerusalem *which is the land of our forefathers,*" since the Old World "city" and "land" were mirrored in a New World "land" and "city" of "Jerusalem" (Alma 21:1-2; 24:1) that were far more directly familiar to his audience.

Far and away the most important example of the situation under discussion here is "Zarahemla." Indeed, it was probably the most important of all Nephite cities (Alma 60:1). But it is

<sup>161</sup> For "Ammonihah," see Alma 8:6-7, 18; 10:1; 14:23; 15:1, 15-16; 16:11; 25:2; 49:1. For "Gideon," see Alma 6:7; 8:1; 17:1; 30:21, 30; 61:5; 62:3-4, 6; Helaman 13:15. For "Helam," see Mosiah 23:20, 25, 29, 35, 37-39; 27:16; Alma 24:1. "Jashon" is mentioned at Mormon 2:16-17. For "Lehi," see Alma 50:15, 25-27; 51:26; 62:30; Helaman 6:10. The quite distinct place known as "Lehi-Nephi" shows up at Mosiah 7:1-2, 4, 21; 9:6. "Manti" receives mention at Alma 16:6; 17:1; 43:22, 24, 32, 42; 56:14; 58:26; 59:6. "Morianton" occurs at Alma 50:25-26, 36; 51:26; 55:33; 59:5. The land and city of "Moroni" are mentioned at Alma 50:13-14; 51:22-24; 59:5; 62:25, 32-34; 3 Nephi 8:9; 9:4. For "Mulek," see Alma 51:25-26; 52:2; Helaman 6:10. "Nehor" is alluded to at Ether 7:4, 9. "Nephihah" appears at Alma 50:14; 62:14, 18, 30. For "Noah," see Alma 49:12-13, 15. "Shem" is briefly mentioned at Mormon 2:20-21. "Shilom" occurs at Mosiah 7:5, 21; 9:6, 14; 11:12-13; 24:1; Alma 23:12.

<sup>162</sup> On "Bountiful," see Alma 22:29, 31; 27:22; 50:11, 32; 51:28, 30, 32; 52:15, 18, 39; 53:3; 63:5; Helaman 1:29; 4:5-6; 3 Nephi 3:23; 11:1. For "Desolation," consult Alma 22:30-32; 46:17; 50:34; 63:5; 3 Nephi 3:23; Mormon 4:1-2; Ether 7:6.

<sup>163</sup> Omni 1:12, 27; Words of Mormon 1:13; Mosiah 7:6-7; 9:1, 14; 19:15, 19, 22, 24; 20:7; 21:21, 26; 23:35-38; 27:16; 28:1, 5; 29:3; Alma 2:24; 17:8; 18:9; 20:1-2; 22:1, 28, 34; 24:20; 25:13; 26:2327:1, 14, 20; 27:23; 28:8; 29:14; 46:29; 47:1; 49:10, 25; 50:8, 11; 53:6; 54:6; 56:3, 12; 58:38; Helaman 4:12; 5:20.

also the name of a "land."<sup>164</sup> Thus, the "king" of the rebels against Pahoran entered into an alliance with the Lamanites "to maintain the city of Zarahemla, which maintenance he supposeth will enable the Lamanites to conquer the remainder of the land" (Alma 61:8). And, when Moroni and Pahoran counterattacked, they "went down with their armies into the land of Zarahemla, and went forth against the city" (Alma 62:7). Later, the Lamanites again came "into the center of the land" and took "the capital city which was the city of Zarahemla" (Helaman 1:27).

Several instances make it clear that the Old World Jerusalem was regarded in precisely the same way by the Nephites as their own cities and lands. Sometimes, the phrase "land of Jerusalem" seems to have referred to the area immediately around the city, or perhaps to the region of Judea. Jesus told the Nephites, for example, of "other sheep, which are not of this land, neither of the land of Jerusalem, neither in any parts of that land round about whither I have been to minister" (3 Nephi 16:1). Lehi's party and the Mulekites are said to have departed from "the land of Jerusalem."<sup>165</sup> And Lehi dwelt "at Jerusalem" (1 Nephi 1:4, 7), but evidently outside the city proper (1 Nephi 3:16, 23–24). On other occasions, by contrast, the phrase seems to denote Judea and Galilee and perhaps all of Palestine. Thus, the Nephites were informed that Christ would "show himself" in "the land of Jerusalem" (Helaman 16:19). Thus, too, the Book of Mormon says that Christ chose his disciples in "the land of Jerusalem" (Mormon 3:18–19)—although the New Testament specifies that at least several of the apostles were called in Galilee. In Nephite usage, "the land of Jerusalem" is the "land" of the Jews'—and, indeed, of all Israel's—eschatological "inheritance," or at least to the area to which they would return

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<sup>164</sup> Omni 1:12–13, 24, 28; Mosiah 1:1, 18; 2:4; 7:9, 13–14; 8:1, 5, 7–8, 14; 9:2; 21:24–26; 22:11, 13; 24:25; 25:5–6, 19, 23; 29:44; Alma 2:24; 3:20; 5:1; 8:1; 15:18; 16:1; 17:1, 7; 22:27–28; 25:2; 26:1, 9, 23; 27:5, 14–15, 20; 28:1; 30:6, 29; 31:3; 35:14; 45:18; 46:33; 47:29; 48:6; 50:7, 11; 51:11; 52:12; 53:10, 12; 56:28, 57; 57:6, 11, 15–16, 28, 30; 58:3–4, 23–24; 59:4; 60:30; 62:6, 11, 14; 63:4; Helaman 1:17–18, 23, 29; 3:3, 31; 4:5; 5:16, 19; 6:4; 7:1; 13:2; 3 Nephi 1:2; 2:9; 3:23; 6:25; Mormon 1:6.

<sup>165</sup> See 1 Nephi heading; also 2:11; 3:9–10; 7:2, 7; 16:35; 17:14, 20, 22; 18:24; 2 Nephi 1:1, 3, 9, 30; Jacob 2:25, 31; Omni 1:6; Mosiah 1:11; 2:4; 7:20; 10:12; Alma 3:11; 9:22; 10:3; 22:9; 36:29; Helaman 5:6; 7:7; 8:21; 3 Nephi 5:20.



following their Babylonian exile.<sup>166</sup> Thus, the phrase clearly refers to an area considerably larger than the urban area of Jerusalem proper.

Words such as "Judah," "Judea," "Galilee," "Palestine," "Israel," and "Samaria" are rarely, if ever, used in a geographical sense in those portions of the Book of Mormon that were written in the New World. "Judah," it is true, occurs numerous times. But most of these occurrences are in quotations from Isaiah, with one case (3 Nephi 24:4) from Malachi 3:4. There are two references to the "loins of Judah" the patriarch (2 Nephi 3:12). The other three references are all to "Zedekiah, king of Judah." Two are statements by Nephi (1 Nephi 1:4; 5:12), who himself lived in Judea under the reign of Zedekiah. The third, Omni 1:5, is a reference to Zedekiah based on the traditions of the Mulekites, who would have had a special reason to maintain traditions about Zedekiah as king of Judah since Mulek was a son of Zedekiah and was therefore theoretical heir to the throne (Helaman 6:10; 8:21). Within the Nephite historiographical tradition itself, however, there are no references to Judah as a geographical unit. There are five references to Judea, all of them referring to a city by that name in the New World.<sup>167</sup> Galilee is mentioned once, while Palestine is mentioned twice, all in quotations from Isaiah.<sup>168</sup> Israel occurs numerous times in the Book of Mormon, but always in the context of a discussion of Israel as a people, not as a geographical region. "Samaria" occurs seven times, all in 2 Nephi 17–20, which simply quotes Isaiah 7–10.

In other words, there are *no* references to the standard biblical geographical terms for the Holy Land in those passages in the Book of Mormon that are not quotations from the Bible. What does this mean? The fact that all of these terms are quoted in the Book of Mormon is clear evidence that Joseph Smith was aware of the existence of such geographical names. Yet they are *never* used as geographical designators within the Nephite tradition. Instead, the standard term used to refer to Judea is the nonbiblical phrase "land of Jerusalem." Thus, within the literary and linguistic context of the Book of Mormon itself, the asser-

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<sup>166</sup> See, for example, 2 Nephi 25:11; 3 Nephi 20:29, 33, 46; Mormon 5:14.

<sup>167</sup> Alma 56:9, 15, 18, 57; 57:11.

<sup>168</sup> Galilee: 2 Nephi 19:1, quoting Isaiah 9:1; Palestine: 2 Nephi 24, quoting Isaiah 14.

tion that Christ will be born “at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers” is simply the Nephite way of saying that Christ is to be born in Judea—a perfectly accurate statement.

We can now return to Bill McKeever’s rejection of the evidence of the Amarna letters. He claims that, “when the Amarna tablets were written, Jerusalem was a city-state. . . . It would make no sense for Alma to use this phrase 1300 years later when the political situation had changed so drastically from the time the Amarna Letters were written.”<sup>169</sup> This is superficially plausible. But McKeever ignores several important pieces of evidence. First, as I have demonstrated above, the Book of Mormon’s use of the phrase “the land of [a city]” is internally consistent and intelligible.<sup>170</sup> This conclusion is dependent for its validity on neither the Amarna tablets nor the Bible. Second, the grammatical construction “land of [a city]” is a Hebrew idiom found in the Bible.

But most importantly, at the time of the beginning of Book of Mormon history (597 B.C.), Jerusalem could indeed be considered nothing more than a city-state. The former kingdom of Judah had been completely conquered by the Babylonians on 16 March, 597, after which time Zedekiah (Mattaniah) was placed on the throne as a Babylonian puppet. Thus, the “first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah” (1 Nephi 1:4), when the story of Lehi opens, was precisely the year of the collapse of the kingdom of Judah, and its reduction to a vassal city-state under Babylonian domination. Although technically still called the “kingdom of Judah,” the area of Zedekiah’s rule had in fact been reduced to the region directly surrounding Jerusalem, which could well be called the “land of Jerusalem.” As John Bright describes it, “Certain of [Judah’s] chief cities, such as Lachish and Debir, had been taken by storm and severely damaged. Her territory was probably restricted by the removal of the Negeb from

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<sup>169</sup> McKeever, “Problems in ‘the Land of’ Jerusalem,” 4.

<sup>170</sup> Hugh Nibley had already pointed this out on p. 101 of *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, but McKeever chooses to ignore it. Incidentally, McKeever also has the irritating habit, prevalent among many anti-Mormons, of describing those authors with whom he agrees by their academic titles and positions, while referring to those authors with whom he *disagrees* as “LDS apologist[s]” (e.g., at “Problems in ‘the Land of’ Jerusalem,” 3). One wonders why McKeever does not mention that Nibley has a Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley and is Professor Emeritus of History and Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University.



her control, her economy crippled and her population drastically reduced.”<sup>171</sup>

This is the political situation with which Nephi was familiar when he left Jerusalem. Judah had been reduced from a kingdom controlling all of Israel and much of Syria in the days of Solomon, to a much more humble status under Babylonian hegemony. In Nephi’s personal experience—and, therefore, in subsequent Nephite tradition—Judah was not an independent kingdom, but a tributary city-state, tenuously ruling only the “land of Jerusalem.”

The prophecy of Alma 7:10 fits into antiquity very well. It is not the sort of thing that Joseph Smith would likely have invented, precisely for the same reason that it bothers enemies of Mormonism. Far from being a serious liability for the Book of Mormon, Alma’s prophetic comment about the birth of the Messiah is plausible evidence that the Nephite record is exactly what it claims to be.

• Ankerberg and Weldon think they have another powerful weapon in 2 Nephi 5. “It took all of 150,000 workers and overseers seven-and-a-half years to build Solomon’s Temple, according to 2 Chronicles 2:2. But the Book of Mormon claims that in twenty years’ time less than 20 people and their descendants had built a temple like Solomon’s” (p. 322).

Ankerberg and Weldon are only approximately correct. The total according to 2 Chronicles 2:2 is 153,600, not 150,000.<sup>172</sup> It is interesting to note that this passage directly contradicts 1 Kings 5:13, which says that the labor corvee was only 30,000 men, who worked in three shifts of 10,000 each.

<sup>171</sup> Bright, *A History of Israel*, 326–31. The most obvious historical parallel to this situation is the fall of Constantinople in the fifteenth century A.D. Despite the fact that the effective power of the Byzantine emperors had been reduced to the city and region of Constantinople for decades, the imperial chronicles continue to describe the state as the “Roman Empire.” Doukas, a contemporary Byzantine eyewitness to the fall of Constantinople, consistently calls the Byzantines “Romans” throughout his *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks*, tr. Harry J. Margoulias (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975). See Margoulias’s comment on p. 265, n. 5. See also Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 15. Calling Judah a “kingdom” in 597 is a similar anachronism.

<sup>172</sup> It is remarkable how often fundamentalists, professed believers in an infallible “Word of God,” nevertheless manage to misread even their Bible.

(So much for biblical inerrancy.) But even the figure of 30,000 might be a scribal error, an exaggeration, or may refer to the work force for all of Solomon's monumental buildings, which included his own palace, the "house of the cedars of Lebanon," a palace for Pharaoh's daughter, and a colonnade (1 Kings 7:1–22; see also 1 Kings 9:15).<sup>173</sup> This is especially true considering Josephus's claim that Herod's temple, which was vastly larger than Solomon's, employed only 1000 laborers.<sup>174</sup>

Be that as it may, we do not know exactly how long it took to build that early Nephite temple. Was it finished during Nephi's lifetime? (Herod never finished "Herod's" temple. Indeed, Josephus reports that it was still under construction when it was destroyed in A.D. 70, ninety years after it was started.)<sup>175</sup> Nephi was writing at the end of his life, and the temple might have been finished years before or it might have been still under construction.<sup>176</sup> However that may be, the inference Ankerberg and Weldon want us to draw is wholly unjustified. Clearly, they want us to conclude that the Nephite colony could not possibly have built a temple like Solomon's, and that the Book of Mormon, therefore, must be both silly and fictional. But this would only be true if we knew that the "likeness" of Nephi's temple to Solomon's consisted in its size and splendor. And this the Book of Mormon does not say. The text goes as follows:

And I, Nephi, did build a temple; and I did construct it after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things; for they were not to be found upon the land, wherefore, it could not be built like unto Solomon's temple. But the manner of the construction was like unto the temple of

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<sup>173</sup> Note that, whereas the House of the Lord took only seven years to build (1 Kings 6:38), Solomon's palace took thirteen years (1 Kings 7:1). When all of the monumental building of Solomon is considered, it is likely that only a fraction of the 10,000 laborers actually worked on the temple itself.

<sup>174</sup> Carol Meyers, "Temple, Jerusalem," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992). 6:365b.

<sup>175</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities* XX, 219.

<sup>176</sup> For interesting insight into the motives and implications of the temple's construction, see Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 66–68.



Solomon; and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine. (2 Nephi 5:16)

What does it mean to be built “after the manner of the temple of Solomon”? I submit that it means to be patterned after, to have the same general layout as Solomon’s temple, without necessarily being on the same scale. At the least, it seems to me, such a reading is every bit as plausible as that of Ankerberg and Weldon. And since we know that smaller Israelite temples did in fact exist in and outside of ancient Israel, there seems no real reason to assume without evidence that one could not have existed among the Nephites. “Biblical evidence,” notes the Israeli archaeologist Avraham Negev, “points to the existence of numerous other cult places all over Palestine, in addition to the main Temple of Jerusalem, and such shrines have now been found at Arad and Lachish, both of a very similar plan.”<sup>177</sup> Indeed, says Negev, “No actual remains of the First Temple [Solomon’s] have come to light, and it is therefore only by the study of the Bible Scriptures and by comparison with other contemporary temples that we can reconstruct the plan.”<sup>178</sup> Negev tells of one such temple, built “after the manner of the temple of Solomon,” as follows: “The most remarkable discovery at Arad is the temple which occupied the north-western corner of the citadel. . . . Its orientation, general plan and contents, especially the tabernacle, are *similar to the Temple of Solomon*. . . . Flanking the entrance to the *hekal* were two stone slabs, probably bases of pillars, similar to the pillars of Jachin and Boaz in the temple at Jerusalem (1 Kgs. 7:21; 2 Chr. 4:17).”<sup>179</sup> Yet the Arad temple was only a small portion of the size of Solomon’s temple.<sup>180</sup> Significantly, it survived, in use, until approximately the time of Lehi.

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<sup>177</sup> Avraham Negev, ed., *Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land* (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1972), 311. See also Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 492–502. Indeed, Negev says that Solomon’s temple followed a general “Canaanite plan,” common to both Hebrew and pagan shrines of the Bronze Age.

<sup>178</sup> Negev, *Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land*, 312.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 (emphasis mine).

<sup>180</sup> Solomon’s temple measured 100 x 50 cubits (165 x 84.5 ft.), whereas the Arad temple measured approximately 60 x 30 ft. Thus it retained the proportions of Solomon’s temple, or as the Book of Mormon

• “We are told that the temple was not built with gold, silver and precious ores like Solomon’s for ‘they were not found upon the land’—even though they also ‘were in great abundance’ in the land (2 Nephi 5:15–24, cf. v. 28)” (p. 322).

What a powerful tool misrepresentation is! Ankerberg and Weldon are correct in saying that gold and silver and precious ores were “in great abundance” in the area of the New World settled by the Nephites, for that is the express declaration of 2 Nephi 5:15. But the Book of Mormon does not contradict itself in anything like the crass way our two authorities claim, for it is “precious things,” not gold and silver and precious ores, that the following verse (accurately quoted) says “were not to be found upon the land.”<sup>181</sup> Once again, they have put words in our mouths (or, more accurately this time, in the mouth of an ancient prophet) in order to discredit Mormonism.

This is no desperate quibble. In the language of the Book of Mormon, “precious things” are routinely distinguished from, not equated with, gold and silver.<sup>182</sup> What, then, were these “precious things”? It is, unfortunately, rather difficult to know. Buildings could be adorned with them (Mosiah 11:9; 4 Nephi 1:41). They could be worn (Alma 31:28). Very likely they were something like precious or semiprecious stones.<sup>183</sup> (In the New World, jade comes to mind.) At Mosiah 11:8, exceptionally, “precious things” seem to include—or, maybe, to be made from—gold, silver, iron, brass, “ziff,” and copper. This may point to the idea that “precious things” are “worked” objects, possibly made from gold and silver and other ores. Perhaps we

puts it, it was “built like unto Solomon’s temple,” but was only about 1/8 the total area of Solomon’s temple.

<sup>181</sup> The early Nephites had simply not yet *found* “precious things.” Two centuries later, they were to be had in abundance. See Jarom 1:8. Perhaps the Nephites had simply begun to recognize a new kind of “precious thing,” like jade.

<sup>182</sup> See, for example, 1 Nephi 2:4, 11; 3:22, 24; Jarom 1:8; Mosiah 11:9; 19:15; 21:21; 22:12; Alma 1:29; 4:6; 15:16; Helaman 12:2; 3 Nephi 6:2; Ether 9:17.

<sup>183</sup> At about the time Solomon’s temple was completed, the king was importing “precious stones” from Sheba and Ophir. See 1 Kings 10:10–13. Whether they were used in the temple is not made clear.



are talking about some sort of jewelry or gilding, of the kind that was common in Solomon's temple.<sup>184</sup>

• Ankerberg and Weldon follow an increasingly popular anti-Mormon tradition in attempting to use the late B. H. Roberts, of the First Council of the Seventy, as a witness against the Book of Mormon—even though they admit that Roberts was “a committed Mormon and apparently remained so until his death” (p. 301). On the basis of several years' research, they allege, Elder Roberts “concluded” that Joseph Smith could have written the Book of Mormon (p. 280).<sup>185</sup> Yet, scandalously, “the Mormon response has been to ignore or downplay the serious nature of Roberts' study” (p. 302).

This is utterly untrue. As usual, Ankerberg and Weldon have simply not bothered to notice Latter-day Saint scholarship on this issue.<sup>186</sup> Then, having seen none, they solipsistically announce that none exists. John Welch, the founder and first president of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, has written extensively on B. H. Roberts and his supposed criticisms of the Book of Mormon. Professor Welch finds

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<sup>184</sup> Solomon's temple was constructed of cedar (1 Kings 5:6, 8, 10; 6:9–10, 15–16, 18, 20, 36), fir (1 Kings 5:8, 10; 6:15, 34), “olive tree” (1 Kings 6:23, 31–33), “almug trees” (sandalwood?; see 1 Kings 10:11–12), “all manner of wood,” and gold (1 Kings 6:20–22, 28, 30, 32, 35; 7:48–51). Hiram of Tyre brought in artisans to work in brass (1 Kings 7:13–47). Silver “precious things” seem to be distinct from silver and gold in 2 Chronicles 21:3<sup>184</sup> and in Ezra 1:6 and in Daniel 11:43. At 1 Kings 10:22, King Solomon is represented as importing gold, silver, and ivory from Tharshish.

<sup>185</sup> B. H. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, edited by Brigham D. Madsen (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985); recently reprinted by the ever-helpful Signature Books.

<sup>186</sup> For some Latter-day Saint writing on B. H. Roberts and the Book of Mormon, see the anonymously edited collection *A Sure Foundation: Answers to Difficult Gospel Questions* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988); Truman G. Madsen, “B. H. Roberts and the Book of Mormon,” in Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1982), 7–31; Truman G. Madsen, ed., “B. H. Roberts: His Final Decade: Statements about the Book of Mormon (1924–1933),” F.A.R.M.S. paper, n.d.; Truman G. Madsen and John W. Welch, “Did B. H. Roberts Lose Faith in the Book of Mormon?” F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1985; John W. Welch, “Finding Answers to B. H. Roberts' Questions,” F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1985; also Welch, “An Unparallel: Ethan Smith and the Book of Mormon.”

an abundance of evidence that Roberts maintained a strong testimony of the Book of Mormon to the end of his days. Yet none of Professor Welch's work finds its way into *Everything*, not even into the footnotes, except a few remarks that Ankerberg and Weldon use to enhance the importance of Elder Roberts as a supposed weapon against Mormon claims (see pp. 301–3). Indeed, incredibly, our two scholars do not even quote B. H. Roberts himself, although they portray him as a star witness for their case. Instead, they quote the late Wesley Walters, a career anti-Mormon, as he *summarizes* Roberts's writings (see pp. 301–2)!

- On page 376, Ankerberg and Weldon cite Proverbs 30:6, which, in the King James translation, reads, "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." Somewhat later, on page 382, they cite Revelation 22:18–19, where, "as if speaking directly to the Mormon church, the Bible sternly warns against adding anything to God's revelation or taking anything from it."

Has there ever been a Latter-day Saint missionary anywhere who has not encountered this weak little argument? Is there any missionary anywhere who cannot dispose of it within seconds? Of *course* human beings should not take it upon themselves to add to God's word. Only *He* can do that—as, in fact, He *did* for many hundreds of years after the writing of Proverbs, even if we limit ourselves to a consideration of the Bible alone. It is the testimony of the Latter-day Saints that God is again speaking, that he is once more adding to his words as he did in ancient times.

- The Bible, say Ankerberg and Weldon, is all-sufficient (pp. 378–79). Therefore, they declare, the specifically Latter-day Saint scriptures are unnecessary and illegitimate. Their evidence for this proposition is 2 Timothy 3:16–17, which clearly says nothing of the sort:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

They also cite 2 Peter 1:3, which says that God's "divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness." However, without any warrant in the text and despite the fact that the word "Bible" never once occurs in the



Bible, they say that it is “the *Bible* and God’s power” that give us everything we need. (Fundamentalist Protestant bibliolatry could hardly be more clearly illustrated than it is in this arbitrary elevation of the Bible to equality with God himself.)

The main problem with both of these citations, though, is that—since the New Testament had obviously not yet been compiled at the time these New Testament letters were being written—the only “scripture” to which either could be referring would be the Old Testament. If these passages are taken to rule out any purported scripture written subsequent to their own composition, then the New Testament itself becomes illegitimate. (Perhaps “Rabbis” Ankerberg and Weldon are tipping their hands here?)

### Finally, the End

Three years ago, in this *Review*, I severely chastised Peter Bartley because his book, *Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book and the Cult*, showed no awareness of Latter-day Saint scholarship or of Mormon responses to the questions he raised, and yet presumed to make sweeping judgments about the truth of the restored gospel and, indeed, about the quality of Mormon scholarship and arguments for the faith. One reader of my essay, however, suggested that I had been too rough on Mr. Bartley, who, after all, had written his book in Ireland and therefore had not, probably, had access to much in the way of Latter-day Saint writing. My response to this was, and is, that the author of a book has a responsibility to do the required research to make it accurate, whether he is in Ireland or Antarctica and however difficult it may be for him to do so. Bartley cannot justly plead geographical isolation as a justification for publishing an ill-informed book. If he did not know enough, his obligation was either to inform himself or to withhold his book. But Ankerberg and Weldon do not even have Bartley’s excuse. They live in the United States. They have access to Latter-day Saint bookstores and excellent library collections on Mormonism. For what it is worth, they have had the tutelage of the Tanners and Wesley Walters and Fawn Brodie. Their book is much more ambitious than Bartley’s—claiming to contain “everything you ever wanted to know about Mormonism”—and many times as long. Yet it is nearly as uninformed as Bartley’s slim little volume. Indeed, the gap between their claims and their actual performance is, I think, greater than that in the Irish book.

Competently written one-volume introductions to the doctrine of the Latter-day Saints exist. Books like James E. Talmage's *The Articles of Faith* and LeGrand Richards's *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* have been printed and reprinted numerous times. For the more historically oriented, Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton's *The Mormon Experience*, or *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, by James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, offer profitable routes of entry.<sup>187</sup> Very recently, two new introductory works on the faith and practice of the Latter-day Saints have entered the market, either one of which represents a virtually infinite improvement over *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism*: Those interested in really understanding their Mormon friends, relatives, and neighbors would learn much from Rex Lee's *What Do Mormons Believe?* or Victor Ludlow's *Principles and Practices of the Restored Gospel*.<sup>188</sup> Ankerberg and Weldon's book, by contrast, is unspeakably bad. It is worthless—nay, worse than worthless—as a guide to the teaching and ethos of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Despite its title, this book will not tell you “everything you ever wanted to know about Mormonism,” unless all you wanted to know was more effective sophistries to use in combating the Latter-day Saints. Readers will not learn from this disgraceful volume why hundreds of thousands of converts from every social status and many lands accept the restored gospel each year, nor why intelligent and well educated people continue to find Mormonism deeply satisfying, both spiritually and intellectually.

At one point, early in the text (p. 13), Ankerberg and Weldon inform their readers that they have subtitled their book “*The Truth about the Mormon Church*.” However, that supposed subtitle occurs neither on the cover of the book nor on the half-title page nor on the title page. Only on the copyright page, in small print, is it to be found. I believe that this is significant. For, indeed, “the truth about the Mormon Church” is difficult, if not impossible, to find in this tiresome, uninformed, often ill-tempered, and occasionally downright nasty book. Why is this

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<sup>187</sup> Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton's *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979); James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992).

<sup>188</sup> Rex E. Lee, *What Do Mormons Believe* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), and Victor L. Ludlow, *Principles and Practices of the Restored Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992).



so? In the fashion of Ankerberg and Weldon themselves, it can have only three conceivable causes: (1) the authors' ignorance, (2) the authors' hostile prejudice, or (3) the authors' combination of ignorance and hostile prejudice. The evidence, I think, overwhelmingly favors the third alternative.