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DAVIDIC REFERENCES IN THE BOOK OF MORMON AS  
EVIDENCE AGAINST ITS HISTORICITY

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by  
Kyle Robert Beshears  
May 2016

**APPROVAL SHEET**

DAVIDIC REFERENCES IN THE BOOK OF MORMON AS  
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1-3 Ne	Nephi, books of
BofM	Book of Mormon
BYU	Brigham Young University
Dialogue	<i>Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought</i>
FARMS	Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies
Hel	Helaman, book of
Interpreter	<i>Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture</i>
JS-H	Joseph Smith–History
LDS	Latter-day Saint
Morm	Mormon, book of
Moro	Moroni, book of

## PREFACE

In 1998, Carl Moser and Paul Owen warned that the evangelical world needed to awaken to contemporary Mormon scholarship. If not, evangelicals would lose the battle without ever knowing the battle occurred. Today, their challenge is still ongoing. The past decade has seen the rapid production of thorough and robust LDS scholarship in support of various aspects of Mormonism. Unfortunately, little has been written by way of evangelical responses. Our LDS counterparts are willing to engage in quality dialogue, but we are responding poorly as disinterested interlocutors. The aim of this thesis is not to offer unassailable and inscrutable evidence against the Book of Mormon's historicity, but to add a small voice to the ongoing evangelical-LDS dialogue in hopes that others would soon do the same.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. George Martin, for his support and encouragement. My mentor in Mormon Studies, John Morehead, III, has been an invaluable source of knowledge and guidance. Naturally, I could not have accomplished this feat without the financial assistance, support, and encouragement of my home church, the People of Mars Hill in Mobile, Alabama. Moreover, my wife, Heather, has been an endless source of love, support, and encouragement through the entire process. Finally, I thank the Lord Jesus Christ for graciously allowing me the opportunity to follow him and pursue his will.

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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Mormon scholarship—more appropriately, Latter-day Saint (LDS) scholarship—seeks to validate the historicity of the Book of Mormon (BofM) through textual criticism by presupposing its historic authenticity, then combing the text for evidence of ancient literary devices such as chiasmus, parallelisms, and thematic elements that may suggest ancient Hebrew authorship. However, given King David’s nonpareil influence over the Hebrew cultural and religious identity, the BofM’s scant and peculiar nature of references to the fabled king produces a competing testimony against the book’s historicity.

To demonstrate this matter, I will first survey examples of relevant LDS scholarship in their attempt to prove the book’s authenticity via internal evidence. Then, I will apply a similar method by presupposing authenticity and searching for evidence to build a testimony contrary to BofM historicism via its portrayal of David. I will survey the treatment of David in the biblical, Qumranic, and intertestamental Jewish identities in juxtaposition with the BofM, i.e., David as presented in “Old World Judaism” vs. “New World Judaism.” These findings will challenge current LDS scholarly thought by using their same methodology to produce opposite, and even undesired, results. Naturally, the question arises: Why do some LDS scholars feel the need to proffer evidence for the BofM as an ancient work?

**Book of Mormon Historicism**

The BofM plays a significant—if not altogether foundational—role in the establishment and stability of the Mormon worldview. Joseph Smith, Jr. (1805–44),

founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church), designated it the “keystone” of the Mormon religion.<sup>1</sup> The book acted as a catalyst for the new religious movement, attracting converts through its clarion call of restorationism amid the religious confusion of mid-nineteenth-century revivalism in upstate New York, dubbed the Burned-Over District by historians. Early Mormonism rested its spiritual authority squarely on the BofM, the very existence of which, irrespective of its content, was felt to be self-authenticating and reason enough for Smith to establish his apostolic authority. Since publication in 1830, however, its message, a mixture of prophecy and narrative, has led believers and skeptics alike to investigate and consider its claims.

The BofM invites critical examination, at least in part, because it presents itself as a literal, historical record of Hebrew inhabitants who emigrated from Palestine to the Western Hemisphere. Its compiled narrative mainly focuses on the story of post-exilic Jews who were divinely delivered from the impending destruction of Jerusalem and subsequent Babylonian Captivity of the sixth century BCE. Lehi, a descendant of the Tribe of Manasseh (Alma 10:3) and patriarch of the small Lehite clan, gathered his family and fled the Israelite capital for the Americas, where his descendants flourished. The timeline of these mormonic Jews runs parallel with exilic and post-exilic Israel, hereafter referred to as biblical Jews.<sup>2</sup>

Upon arriving in the New World, two of Lehi’s sons, Nephi and Laman, became bitter rivals whose descendants, the Nephites and Lamanites, carried out generational conflict in the wake of their fathers’ strife. Despite the conflict, the

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<sup>1</sup>JS-H 4:461

<sup>2</sup>This thesis introduces a helpful neologism within Mormon Studies. The term *mormonic* serves as an adjectival descriptor of anything deriving from the Book of Mormon, similar to the use of the term *biblical* to describe anything deriving from the Bible. The use of this terminology does away with the cumbersome phrasing of “Book of Mormon” to describe its people, narrative, events, theology (i.e., “Book of Mormon prophecy” and “Book of Mormon people” vs. “mormonic prophecy” and “mormonic people”).

mormonic people grew in culture and economy, even colonizing vast tracts of Mesoamerican lands.<sup>3</sup> The narrative climaxes in a New World visitation from the post-ascension Christ to the Nephites and Lamanites, where the messiah ministered to his “other sheep” (3 Ne 16:1). A subsequent time of peace between the two nationalities was violently interrupted by relentless and devastating warfare that culminated in the annihilation of the Nephites around 421 CE. The records of the Nephites were consolidated and abridged by a redactor, Mormon, after whom the book is named. Mormon’s son, Moroni, assumed the narration, concluded the record, and buried it near a hill in modern upstate New York for Joseph Smith, Jr. to discover in the nineteenth century, some fourteen centuries later.

It is important to note that the author of the BofM intends his readers to understand the mormonic Jews as decidedly Hebrew in their ancestry, religious life, and culture. Shortly after fleeing into the countryside, Lehi instructed his sons to return to Jerusalem and procure a set of brass plates (Plates of Laban) that contained “the record of the Jews” (1 Ne 5:6), essentially the Hebrew Bible as it existed pre-exile.<sup>4</sup> These brass plates included: the Torah (1 Ne 5:11), the historical works of Joshua through 2 Chronicles (1 Ne 5:12), “prophecies of holy prophets” during that same period (1 Ne 5:13), “many prophecies which have been spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah” (1 Ne 5:13), and non-canonical prophecies of Joseph in Egypt (2 Ne 4:1-2). Presumably, the “many prophecies” of Jeremiah did not include the complete work of

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<sup>3</sup>Due to the nature of the Book of Mormon, to date no one has been able to demonstrate conclusively a cohesive and comprehensive mormonic geography. Popular theories for placing the Book of Mormon geographically situate it in Central America. For the sake of coherence, a limited Mesoamerican geography will be assumed for this thesis. See John Sorensen, *Mormon’s Codex* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2013).

<sup>4</sup>The exact contents of the Plates of Laban are unknown. Nephi mentions the inclusion of the Torah along with pre-exilic histories (i.e., Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings) and prophetic works (i.e., Isaiah, Jeremiah, and some minor prophets). Obviously not included are any exilic or post-exilic works such as Ezekiel, Daniel, and Ezra-Nehemiah. Since Nephi does not mention wisdom literature, it is unknown if any of the corpus was included in the mormonic Hebrew Bible. Also unknown is whether or not the plates included apocryphal or non-extant works (i.e., Book of Jasher, Book of Enoch, Acts of Solomon, etc.).

the prophet's career. Lehi escaped from Jerusalem before the Babylonian siege and captivity in 587 BCE, which occurred prior to the completion of the book of Jeremiah.<sup>5</sup>

Hebrew culture and religion was thus carried by Lehi's family from Judea to the shores of the Mesoamerican promised land. Nephi, the unequivocal leader of the mormonic Jews, built a temple "after the manner of the temple of Solomon" (2 Ne 5:16). The establishment of synagogues, or "churches," was prevalent throughout mormonic history (Mosiah 25:22). The people were frequently commanded and challenged to keep the laws, despite knowing "the deadness of the law" through the future coming of the Christ (1 Ne 4:14-15; 2 Ne 25:24, 27, 30; Jacob 7:7; Jarom 1:11; Mosiah 3:14; Alma 25:15; 31:9; Hel 6:23; 3 Ne 1:24). Sabbath-keeping was an important aspect of the rhythm of their religious life (Mosiah 13:16; Jarom 1:5). It quickly becomes apparent to the reader that, according to the narrative, the mormonic people are Jews, Christ's "other sheep," who, like their distant kin in the Old World, strove to maintain their cultural and religious heritage no matter where they were, whether in Babylon or the New World.

Consequently, the BofM self-identifies as a historical, parallel-canonical Jewish text to the Old and New Testaments, an "ancient Hebrew lineage history," that should reflect (at the very least) Semitic origins when the style and content of the text are pressed for evidence of its authenticity.<sup>6</sup> Grant Hardy, author of numerous academic works and articles on the BofM, articulates this sentiment well

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<sup>5</sup>That the book of Jeremiah was written and compiled in full by the time this mormonic episode occurs is not possible given its account of the fall of Jerusalem. As Peter Craigie et al. note, the "basic substance of the book was no doubt complete by 550 B.C., though the subsequent manuscript traditions . . . indicate that there continued to be differences in the precise shape and form of the book." Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley, and Joel F. Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 26 (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1991), xl.

<sup>6</sup>Monte S. Nyman and Lisa Bolin Hawkins, "Book of Mormon," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), 1:143.

when he contends that it is “a book that insists on its authenticity as an ancient record, miraculously preserved and translated.”<sup>7</sup> To further carry Hardy’s observation, the BofM is not merely a book that insists on ancient origins, but a *Hebrew* book that insists on the same. Consequently, one would anticipate that whatever is true of the Old and New Testaments should also be true of the BofM, so far as internal and external evidence is concerned. This hypothesis—belief in the verifiable historicity of the Book of Mormon both in form and content—may be dubbed “Book of Mormon historicism.”

BofM historicism is an idea that the LDS Church has maintained from its earliest days. Mormonism has traditionally understood the BofM as both confirming and supplementing the Old and New Testaments in form and content as the third installment of an epic trilogy of God’s past dealings with his covenant people. In many ways, the BofM resembles the English translation of the biblical writings that, canonically speaking, preceded it by millennia. Its writing style and flow resemble the historic and prophetic books of the OT while anachronistically mirroring the apostolic, Christocentric preaching of the NT.

Unlike the Old and New Testaments, however, the BofM suffers from a notable dearth of evidence to corroborate its claims to antiquity. Commonly discussed issues among believers and skeptics include: historical concerns such as insufficient archeological support, potential anachronisms, and DNA studies that suggest a lack of genetic evidence linking ancient Israelites and indigenous Americans. On each of these points, BofM apologists have offered fantastic and comprehensive solutions that, generally speaking, have not found wide acceptance outside LDS scholarly circles. Skeptics, for their part, have reused and recycled these

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<sup>7</sup>Grant Hardy, “The Book of Mormon,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism*, ed. Terryl L. Givens and Philip L. Barlow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 134.

arguments as smoking guns of Joseph Smith's fraud. Both sides of the debate are unflagging, relentlessly volleying exchanges back and forth across a court of spectators that seems unending.

Not all LDS scholars see the future of BofM historicism hinging on this exchange. Renowned BofM apologist Hugh Nibley once pleaded that Latter-day Saints "must stop looking for the wrong things" in the context of external, archeological evidence.<sup>8</sup> Some historicists have taken Nibley's plea to mean that looking for the right things in the right place includes internal, textual analysis. They are wearied from timeworn arguments over external proof of the book's historicity, and are turning their attention inward toward the potential discovery of internal evidences. These BofM historicists are asking questions such as: What does the BofM say about itself (literarily, theologically, culturally, etc.)? Do the cultural and religious details in the BofM match what is known about ancient Judaism? Do they reflect what should be anticipated from an ancient Mesoamerican diaspora of Jews?

Optimally, these questions would be answered with the aid of the original BofM text, or, at the very least, copies and fragments of the text. Unfortunately, the original text is non-extant. Instead, it solely exists as an English translation of a purportedly Hebrew text that was consolidated by one redactor-editor, Mormon, into an unknown language referred to as "reformed Egyptian" (Morm 9:32), which likewise suffers from non-extant manuscript evidence. The closest anyone may approach the original document (ancient gold plates) is through the printer's manuscript of the first edition (1830) of the BofM, which is still one manuscript removed from Smith's original manuscript created between April-June 1829.

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<sup>8</sup>Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1988), 431.

In sum, because the BofM is foundational to the Mormon worldview, and claims historical dimensions without robust external (archeological) evidence, many BofM historicists have embarked on a quest for internal confirmation through textual criticism. Yet, given the unique circumstances surrounding the BofM's creation, how are such evidences discoverable if they are buried in an English text without the luxury of copies or facsimiles of the original source, or the source itself? Many believe that hidden within the English translation are residual clues left by Hebraic chiasmus, parallelisms, and thematic patterns from the original language and writing style used by the BofM's authors. Such discoveries led the popular *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* to excitedly announce that research into this field has "found Hebrew poetic forms, rhetorical patterns, and idioms."<sup>9</sup> LDS scholars are so confident of these finds that when the BofM is translated into other languages, the translators are encouraged to retain as much of the archaic English structure as possible so as not to disturb the hidden Semitic structure lurking beneath the surface.<sup>10</sup>

The potential reward for this labor is obvious. If the BofM can be shown to reflect Semitic origins, then the claim that the original contributors were Hebrew is more plausible, helping to establish the book's historicity. LDS scholar John Sorenson once promised believers that research into this area would render the religious text "more believable" and capable of being "communicated more forcefully" to nonbelievers.<sup>11</sup> LDS apologist Louis Midgley articulated this sentiment in the negative: Mormonism "is true if—and only if—the Book of Mormon is an

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<sup>9</sup>Nyman and Hawkins, "Book of Mormon," 143.

<sup>10</sup>Paul Gutjahr, *The Book of Mormon: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 129-30.

<sup>11</sup>John Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1996), xvii.

authentic ancient history.”<sup>12</sup> It should come as no surprise that Mormon interest in this area has grown in recent years, especially in the face of negligible external evidence. The *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, *BYU Studies*, *Dialogue*, and *Interpreter*, along with Oxbridge and numerous Ivy League publishers, have all produced works in the past decade that constitute the growing body of such scholarly efforts. There is an emerging sense of confidence within BofM historicism that future research will only garner more positive evidence to support their thesis. Such efforts may seem chimerical to skeptics, but supporters have churned out an impressive amount of complex arguments to advance their cause.

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<sup>12</sup>Louis Midgley, “Faith and History,” in *“To Be Learned Is Good If...”: A Response by Mormon Educators to Controversial Questions*, ed. Robert Millet (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 224.

CHAPTER 2  
CURRENT TRENDS IN BOOK OF MORMON  
HISTORICISM

As previously explained, much of contemporary BofM historicism validates its hypothesis through textual criticism by presupposing authenticity and combing the text for evidence of Hebraic literary devices. Their methodology focuses on the BofM’s literary style and structure, pressing the text for Hebraisms such as parallelisms, chiasmus, transliterated words, themes, and syntax. Perhaps the most well-known work on this effort—indeed, the spark that caused the flame—is John Welch’s research into chiasmus.

**Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon**

In 1969, John Welch, founder of the LDS apologetic think-tank Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), published a paper announcing his discovery of a specific Hebraic literary style in the BofM – chiasmus.<sup>1</sup> Welch argued that assuming his instances of chiasmi were authentic, then their presence indicated Hebraic origin since chiasmus was a popular literary tool in ancient Jewish writing and would have been (presumably) unknown to Smith at the time he translated the gold plates. In Welch’s words, “If chiasmus can be convincingly identified in the Book of Mormon, then specific Hebraisms will testify of its origin.”<sup>2</sup> A chiasm, coined from the Greek letter χ (chi) resembling the chiastic form, is a

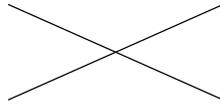
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<sup>1</sup>While FARMS began as a non-profit organization, the group became part of Brigham Young University (BYU) in 1997. It was later merged with the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship of BYU in 2006. The Maxwell Institute currently publishes three scholarly journals: *Journal of the Book of Mormon*, *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity*, and *Mormon Studies Review*.

<sup>2</sup>John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 10, no. 1 (1969): 74.

literary device that organizes sentences and passages by inversion or parallels in order to emphasize a point. In the simplest forms, a chiasm crosses over ( $\chi$ ) to invert a parallelism. For example, Matthew 10:39 (NRSV):

Those who *find* their life will *lose* it, and



those who *lose* their life [...] will *find* it.

Complex chiastic structures invert whole verses or passages and are typically formed in an A B B' A' structure. These complex chiasmi are well demonstrated throughout the Bible, especially in the OT. Isaiah 6:10 (NRSV) provides an excellent example.

A Make the *mind* of this people dull,  
B and stop their *ears*,  
C and shut their *eyes*;  
C' so that they may not look with their *eyes*,  
B' and listen with their *ears*,  
A' and comprehend with their *minds*, and turn and be healed.

The author's emphasis is on the inability of Israel's senses to hear, see, and understand, which in turn inhibits the nation's repentance. This chiastic structure is an inversion, which draws the reader's attention to Israel's eyes (C, C') and causes the reader to meditate on the consequence of the nation's blindness. Welch argued that these types of chiasmi are present in the BofM; and, rightly so, if the book was truly written by ancient Jews. One example he put forward was 2 Nephi 29:13.

A And the *Jews*  
     B shall have the *words*  
         C of the *Nephites*  
         C' and the *Nephites*  
     B' shall have the *words*  
 A' of the *Jews*.  
 A<sub>2</sub> And the *Nephites* and the *Jews*  
     B<sub>2</sub> shall have the *words*  
         C<sub>2</sub> of the lost tribes of *Israel*  
         C<sub>2</sub>' and the lost tribes of *Israel*  
     B<sub>2</sub>' shall have the *words* of  
 C<sub>2</sub>' the *Nephites* and the *Jews*.

Welch further argued that Smith would have no knowledge of chiasmus—assuming he lacked the ability to glean any implicit understanding of the form from the KJV text—to silence potential naysayers who might find the evidence coincidental or forged. It would have been highly unlikely for Smith to create chiasmic passages and structures in the BofM, unintentional or not. Welch concluded that the presence of chiasmus in the pages of the BofM rendered it “logical to consider the book a product of the ancient world and to judge its literary qualities accordingly.”<sup>3</sup> After all, which is more likely: that an unschooled farm boy from nineteenth-century rural New York intentionally replicated a literary device common to ancient Hebrews or that ancient Hebrews produced a book in stylistic concert with other works they produced? This reasoning has been an underlying argument for BofM historicism ever since.

Welch’s work has received mixed reviews from a wider audience, essentially drawing a line between historicists and skeptics. In 2004, two BofM historicists, Boyd F. Edwards and W. Farrell Edwards, physicists by profession, sought to reinforce Welch’s work by developing a quantitative tool to determine the likelihood

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<sup>3</sup>Welch, “Chiasmus,” 84.

of chiasmus appearing by chance in the BofM.<sup>4</sup> In support of Welch's thesis, and in objection to his critics, Edwards and Edwards determined that select chiasmi in the BofM were not present by accident or forgery; rather, they were intentional devices used by the ancient Hebrew authors. In fact, the two researchers argued that one mormonic passage, Alma 36:1–30, boasted a higher likelihood of intentional chiasmus than did a biblical passage, Leviticus 24:13–23.<sup>5</sup>

Skeptics, unconvinced by Welch's methodology, accuse him and supporters of seeing chiasmus where it does not exist. Typical rejoinders contend that any chiasm in the BofM, excluding biblical imports (e.g., quotations, paraphrasing, plagiarism), is accidental, imagined, or even manufactured. One skeptic suggested that accidental chiasmus is a discernable phenomenon that occurred in early LDS revelations and personal journal entries.<sup>6</sup> Another satirically pointed out the presence of chiasmus in Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham*, highlighting the possibility of seeing chiasmi where they do not exist.<sup>7</sup> Earl M. Wunderli accused Welch of manufacturing Hebraisms by selecting only those words and phrases which force a chiasm on the text, creating what he called "false symmetry."<sup>8</sup> For Wunderli this creation of forced chiasmus was especially true of Alma 36:1–30, the passage that captivated the attention of Edwards and Edwards. He contended that the mormonic

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<sup>4</sup>Boyd F. Edwards and W. Farrell Edwards, "Does Chiasmus Appear in the Book of Mormon by Chance?" *BYU Studies* 43, no. 2 (2004): 103–30.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 110. It should be noted that, assuming BofM authenticity, one would expect a chiastic structure from Alma 36:1–30 over Lev 24:13–23 given the nature of these two passages (narrative-homily and law). The two are completely different genres of literature. Edwards and Edwards's comparison is a bit like comparing apples to oranges, then being surprised when the oranges boast a higher acidity level than apples.

<sup>6</sup>Brent Lee Metcalfe, "Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity," *Dialogue* 26, no. 3 (1993): 153–84.

<sup>7</sup>Robert Patterson, "Hebraicisms, Chiasmus, and Other Internal Evidence for Ancient Authorship in *Green Eggs and Ham*," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 33, no. 4 (2000): 163–68.

<sup>8</sup>Earl M. Wunderli, "Critique of Alma 36 as an Extended Chiasm," *Dialogue* 38, no. 4 (2005): 102.

passage “seems hardly to be a carefully crafted masterpiece by Alma but a creatively fashioned chiasm imposed on the text by Welch.”<sup>9</sup> Wunderli’s critique prompted a rebuttal from Edwards and Edwards, who in turn accused him of ignoring other chiasmi in the BofM, and argued that, “the significance of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon does not rest on Alma 36:1–30 alone.”<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, Welch’s paper set the tempo for later BofM historicist efforts to search the text for hints of Semitic origins. While some historicists would model their research after Welch’s work, others deviated to explore the uncharted waters of related Hebraisms. One, in particular, has advanced Welch’s hypothesis by broadening the categories of Hebraisms present in the BofM.

### **Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon**

Donald Parry, Professor of Hebrew Bible and Dead Sea Scrolls at Brigham Young University, has augmented Welch’s work by backing away from the limited field of chiasmus in order to survey the possibility of other Hebraisms in the text. Instead of focusing on one specific literary element, Parry asked a simple question: If chiastic structures exist in the BofM, and chiasmus is a subset of poetic parallelisms (being an inverted parallelism), what other possible parallelisms exist within the text? For Parry, Welch’s chiasmus had the potential of being just one Hebraic element in a sea of many more Hebraisms inundating the text.

In 1998, Parry answered his own question by publishing an exhaustive edition of the BofM formatted to display what he deemed to be Hebraic elements.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Wunderli, “Critique of Alma 36,” 106.

<sup>10</sup>Boyd F. Edwards and W. Farrell Edwards, “Response to Earl Wunderli’s Critique of Alma 36 as an Extended Chiasm,” *Dialogue* 39, no. 3 (2006): 168.

<sup>11</sup>Parry’s edition of the BofM was not the first to be reformatted in light of potential Hebraisms, but it seems to be the most influential work of its kind. See Wade Brown, *The God-Inspired Language of the Book of Mormon: Structuring and Commentary* (Clackamas, OR: Rainbow Press, 1988).

The work, *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon*, currently in its second edition, accomplished two of Parry's goals.<sup>12</sup> The first was to identify more parallelisms than just chiasmus, which he claims to have done. Parry's edition featured various Hebraisms, the most common of which were, as the title indicates, parallelisms. Parry noted that parallelisms lay the foundation in Hebrew literature for the construction of proverbs, poems, songs, prayers, psalms, and the like.<sup>13</sup> Proverbs 11:1 (NRSV) provides an example of a basic parallelism.

A A *false* balance  
B is an abomination to the Lord,  
A' but a *just* weight  
B' is his delight.

Here, the concept of *false* and *just* are contrasted (paralleled) with *abomination* and *delight*. Parry believes that this type of parallelism is seen in 1 Nephi 12:9.

And he said unto me  
A Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb?  
B Behold they are they who shall judge  
C the twelve tribes of Israel;  
A' wherefore, the twelve ministers of thy seed  
B' shall be judged of them;  
C' for ye are of the house of Israel.

*Poetic Parallelisms* formats the BofM to showcase all kinds of parallelisms from simple chiasmus and inverted parallelisms to more complex extended synthetic and antithetical parallelisms. In fact, the example from 1 Nephi 12:9 is not simply a parallelism, but an extended alternate parallelism.<sup>14</sup>

The second goal Parry accomplished was to display the vast array of Hebraisms in a format accessible to other researchers and future generations. Parry

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<sup>12</sup>Donald W. Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon: The Complete Text Reformatted*, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2007).

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

recognized the difficulty for novice readers to identify parallelisms in the standard block formatting of the BofM. His edition retained much of the narrative in block format, yet pulled out what he considered to be Hebraic elements, organizing them in a way that displays them appropriately. Not only did Parry advance and expand Welch's hypothesis, he also provided fellow historicists with a tool for further research. Welch, who wrote the forward to *Poetic Parallelisms*, promised readers that Parry's formatted edition "demonstrates many things about the Book of Mormon," presenting the work in such a way that provides "evidence that the Book of Mormon was translated accurately from an underlying Hebrew text."<sup>15</sup> Parry confidently predicted that "subsequent generations, no doubt, will discover additional rhetorical forms, figures of speech, and poetic types that shed light on the work of those who wrote and edited the Book of Mormon."<sup>16</sup>

Criticism of Parry's work has gone largely unaddressed despite being published over a decade ago. Instead, as Parry hoped and predicted, future generations have picked it up and are carrying on the baton. For example, Carl J. Cranney (Ph.D., Catholic University of America) has advanced Parry's analysis of parallelisms in what he described as a "tentative step" toward determining whether or not the likelihood of such Hebraisms can be statistically measured. Cranney's methodology first assumed that BofM parallelisms are intentionally present. Then, as with Parry, he contended that Hebrew poetic parallelisms are also found scattered throughout the text.<sup>17</sup> In a unique departure from both Welch and Parry before him, instead of simply identifying parallelisms, Cranney sought to demonstrate that specific passages are statistically more likely than not to contain parallelisms.

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<sup>15</sup>Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms*, viii.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., xii.

<sup>17</sup>Carl J. Cranney, "The Deliberate Use of Hebrew Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 23 (2014): 140–65.

In doing so, Cranney raised the question about whether some passages should anticipate a higher chance of utilizing parallelism. To demonstrate his hypothesis, Cranney separated passages that he believed were originally meant for oral recitation from those meant for written circulation. Since parallelisms were a mnemonic device, one would expect to find them more frequently utilized in passages that were originally oral in tradition rather than written, the former requiring a simple memorization device for generational transmission, thus the need for the parallelism.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, were the parallelisms created accidentally by a nineteenth-century author, one would expect them to appear randomly throughout the text. Cranney's research showed that parallelisms appear more frequently in speeches than in written communication, lending credibility toward the legitimacy of those parallelisms found within an area of the text that records oral tradition. Consequently, he contended that parallelisms are not randomly strewn about the BofM, as would be expected if they were accidental or forged. Instead, they appear precisely where they are expected.

Cranney has added a new component to the growing evidence that BofM historicists are offering in support of their thesis. He boasted, "Not only do parallelistic structures exist in the Book of Mormon (deliberate or not, Parry has demonstrated their existence), they also significantly occur precisely where they contextually should occur and are absent where their presence would be surprising."<sup>19</sup> Were it the other way around—parallelisms present where they were not expected—an argument could be made that their presence is mere coincidence.

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<sup>18</sup>Cranney, "Hebrew Parallelisms," 146.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 157.

## Biblical Themes and Characters in the Book of Mormon

While parallelisms have captured most historicists' attention, it is certainly not the only area being researched. Another question being asked is whether the BofM contains thematic similarities between mormonic and biblical characters and stories, which would corroborate the anticipated continuity between Old and New World Jewish cultures. For example, Noel B. Reynolds, Professor of Political Science at Brigham Young University, has contended for a Mosaic motif in the mormonic prophets Nephi and Lehi.<sup>20</sup> Reynolds believes that both men recognized that they were playing into the typology, thereby rejecting the notion that a distant author placed the Moses type on them.<sup>21</sup>

Both Moses and Nephi fled into the wilderness after committing murder (Exod 2:11-15; 1 Ne 4:18, 38). They likewise dealt with recurrent insolence and disobedience from their followers (Exod 17:2-4; Num 21:5; 1 Ne 16:37; 17:48). Both needed divine assistance for food in the wilderness (Exod 16:1-16; 1 Ne 16:18-31). Both ascended a mountain to receive instruction from God (Exod 24:18; 1 Ne 11:1). Perhaps the most obvious correlation is both men's leadership in bringing God's people to a promised land, Canaan and the New World respectively (Exod 12:25; 1 Ne 2:20). Both traversed dangerous seas during their trek, although Nephi spent a considerable amount of more time doing so (Exod 14; 1 Ne 18). Both built sacred spaces for worship, as Moses was instructed to construct the tabernacle, and Nephi built a temple modeled after Solomon's (Exod 25-27; 2 Ne 5:16). Both leaders appointed successors near their deaths (Deut 34:9; Jacob 1:9, 18). Furthermore, these connections were apparently not lost on Nephi since he related his experience to Moses twice; once when obtaining a brass record of his people (1 Ne 4:2-3), and

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<sup>20</sup>Noel B. Reynolds, "The Israelite Background of Moses Typology in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005): 5-23.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

second, during the construction of a ship (1 Ne 17:23–32). It is not difficult to understand why Reynolds also sees a connection between Moses and Lehi given the patriarch’s shared experiences with his son Nephi (i.e., communication with God, leading people through the wilderness, to cross a sea, and be delivered to a promised land).<sup>22</sup>

Thematic nods to Moses are not the only places where the OT prophet is found in the BofM. In fact, Moses is mentioned 63 times throughout the book, from the beginning in 1 Nephi toward the end in Ether. He was God’s prophet (1 Ne 22:21), the one whom God raised up to valiantly deliver Israel from the bondage of Egypt (2 Ne 3:9-10). The covenantal “promise of Moses” was associated with God’s relationship to Israel and her progeny (2 Ne 3:16). Moses was credited as the author of the Torah (1 Ne 5:11; 19:23), also known as the “law of Moses,” which featured predominantly across the entire BofM (2 Ne 11:4; 25:24, 30; Jacob 4:5; 7:7; Jarom 1:5, 11; Mosiah 2:3; 3:14-15; 12:28-33; 13:27-28; 16:14; 24:5; Alma 25:15-16; 30:3; 31:9; 34:13; Hel 13:1; 15:5; 3 Ne 1:24; 9:17; 15:2-8; 25:4; 4 Ne 1:12; Ether 12:11). The “law of Moses” was often mentioned when mormonic authors juxtaposed works-based salvation and the atonement of Christ (Mosiah 3:15; Alma 34:13). In fact, the “law of Moses” was simply a “typifying of [Christ]” (2 Ne 11:4), a “shadow of things which are to come,” which worked as a tool utilized by God to teach his people about redemption in “Christ the Lord, who is the very eternal Father (Mosiah 16:14).”

Furthermore, Moses’s law was a foreshadow of Christ, whom the OT figure also prophesied would come, as Abraham had before him (2 Ne 11:4; 3 Ne 20:23). Popular stories of the OT prophet were retold: Moses lifting up of the serpent on the staff in the wilderness (2 Ne 25:20; Alma 33:19), Moses’s face shining after being in God’s presence (Mosiah 13:5), Moses smiting the rock to bring forth water

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<sup>22</sup>Reynolds, “Israelite Background,” 10.

in the wilderness (1 Ne 17:29), the parting of the Red Sea (1 Ne 4:2; 17:26; Hel 8:11), and the mystery surrounding Moses's unknown burial location (Alma 45:19). Perhaps most importantly to the Mormon movement, the BofM sees Moses as the prototype of a righteous, eschatological leader that finds its fulfillment in Joseph Smith (2 Ne 3:15-17).

Relatedly, although not discussed by Reynolds, the BofM directly references another important OT character as well. Abraham is mentioned 27 times throughout the BofM, from the beginning in 1 Nephi toward the end in the book of Ether. The Nephites referred to him as "father Abraham," which clearly identified him as the progenitor of their nation (1 Ne 15:18; 2 Ne 29:14; Hel 3:30; 3 Ne 20:25). They frequently identified their god as the "God of Abraham" (1 Ne 6:4; 19:10; Mosiah 23:23; Alma 29:11; 36:2; 3 Ne 4:30; Morm 9:11) who made a covenant with the patriarch to which the Nephites belonged (1 Ne 15:18; 22:9; 3 Ne 20:27). This covenant promised a future messianic figure, whom Abraham prophetically anticipated his coming (Hel 8:14-19).

Consequently, considering both the amount of attention given to Moses and the Mosaic motif found in mormonic characters, Reynolds suggests, "the fact that Nephi and Lehi both saw themselves as Moses figures demonstrates their awareness of a recognizable feature of preexilic Israelite literature that has only recently been explicated by Bible scholars."<sup>23</sup> In other words, mormonic people knew enough about preexilic Israelite leaders to honor and emulate them not only in the way they lived, but also in the way they wrote about themselves. They showcased their admiration for major biblical characters by crafting thematic motifs. For Reynolds, the appearance of beloved biblical characters through types in the BofM is evidence of its authenticity. He further argued the Hebraic literary tradition of the

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<sup>23</sup>Reynolds, "Israelite Background," 5.

OT practically demands “that [Nephi and Lehi] presented themselves as antitypes for Moses.”<sup>24</sup> So strong is this evidence that Reynolds boldly proclaimed, “it would make sense to criticize the Book of Mormon had it not made these kinds of strong, natural comparisons.”<sup>25</sup>

These thematic nods and direct references to biblical characters in the BofM demonstrate that the New World Jews were not merely aware of their history as a people, but they desired to sustain their Hebrew cultural identity by referencing and describing their most influential leaders in terms of biblical history. Thus, according to BofM historicism, part of what makes the book authentic is its references and allusions to famous biblical characters, because they suggest continuity between Old and New World Jews.

### **BofM Historicist Methodology Applied to Davidic References**

The work of Welch, Parry, Cranney, and Reynolds represents only a small portion of the total body of LDS scholarship in recent decades attempting to prove the BofM’s historicity via internal evidences by presupposing its authenticity. An obvious question is raised: Is it possible to assume the historicist methodology of reading the BofM as an ancient Hebrew text and discover testimony of inauthenticity? I believe this possibility exists, with one example found in the scant and incongruent nature of mormonic references to King David given the book’s ostensibly Jewish background. Readers of the BofM familiar with the immense stature of David in the biblical Jewish identity may find themselves nonplussed at the paltry seven references to Israel’s greatest king, especially considering the numerous Abrahamic and Mosaic references.

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<sup>24</sup>Reynolds, “Israelite Background,” 5.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

If the mormonic people were truly Jewish, why has King David essentially absconded from their historical and prophetic records relative to biblical Judaism? Is it really possible that the BofM, a text that prides itself on incredibly descriptive prophecies of the coming messiah, could neglect to feature one of the most prominent figures in the messianic lineage? Asking this question, of course, presupposes that David was important enough to ancient Israel that one is justified in expecting to see references or allusions to him in the BofM. This presupposition may be validated by contemplating two related questions. First, is David significant enough to the Hebrew identity to warrant, at the very least, any references by mormonic Jews? Second, if David's significance warrants mentioning, are the nature of the Davidic references in the BofM what one would expect from an ancient Hebrew document?

## CHAPTER 3

### DAVID'S INFLUENCE ON BIBLICAL AND MORMONIC JEWISH IDENTITIES

Of all David's contributions to the Hebrew religious identity, two stand out as being particularly influential: his Psalms and the messianic expectation that grew out of his reign. The NT writers seem most interested in these two aspects of David, referencing him almost exclusively in the context of psalmic material or arguments that portray Christ as David's descendant and heir to his eternal throne. At the very least, one would anticipate quotations of Davidic psalms and the hopeful anticipation of an eschatological, Davidic king in the BofM. However, its sermons, prophecies, and epistles never quote Davidic psalms, and almost entirely exclude him from their messianic prophecies. In fact, at times, the BofM's prophetic insight is so precise that it comes across as anachronistic, sounding more like the apostolic sermons of first-century CE Palestine than it does the vague, polyvalent predictions of the OT. For example, the prophets Nephi and Alma, allegedly writing during the last half of the first millennia BCE, prophesied that the messiah, whose "name shall be Jesus Christ" (2 Ne 25:19), would be born in Jerusalem of the virgin Mary, "mother of the Son of God" (1 Ne 11:18; Alma 7:10). Ultimately, Jesus Christ would come to "layeth down his life" (2 Ne 2:8), then be "lifted up upon the cross" (1 Ne 11:33), and after three days he would "rise from the dead" (2 Ne 25:13). Nephi accurately predicted that all this would occur in the future, approximately six-hundred years from his lifetime, ca. 588–70 BCE (1 Ne 19:8).

The uncanny level of prophetic insight that these mormonic prophets practiced is breathtaking in comparison to the shadowy predictions of the biblical

prophets. While the Old World Jews yearned for a vague, future Davidic messiah, the New World Jews eagerly awaited Jesus Christ by name and date. Yet, this prophetic acumen does not necessarily warrant the practical dismissal of David from the BofM. The mormonic people are, after all, described as Jewish in culture, heritage, and identity. Therefore, regardless of the level of prophetic insight they appeared to have, one would still expect to see a similar level of interest and respect for David in the BofM as in the Old and New Testaments. How, then, does the Bible understand David?

### **David's Influence on the Biblical Jewish Identity**

As a warrior-king, psalmist, and prototype to the messianic king, David dominates the biblical Jewish imagination from his birth around the eleventh century BCE well into the first century CE. Although his story emerges in the books of Samuel and concludes shortly after in the books of Kings, his influence echoes throughout the history of his ethnic and religious descendants, both Jew and Christian alike. To say that David left a mark on the biblical Jewish identity is an understatement. Noted OT scholar Walter Bruggeman observed that “the literature and the faith of Israel are endlessly fascinated with David.”<sup>1</sup> Robert North suggested that this fascination drove some of Israel, particularly the Chronicler, toward a form of “Davidism” whereby the nation found their “chosenness” in Yahweh not with Moses at Mount Sinai but with David at Mount Zion.<sup>2</sup>

In his sweeping biography, *King David*, Steve McKenzie seemed to take for granted that Israel's history was largely shaped by the “popular religious hero.”<sup>3</sup> He

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination and Memory*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 113.

<sup>2</sup>Robert North, “Theology of the Chronicler,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82 (1963): 378.

<sup>3</sup>Steven McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 188.

was, bar none, Israel's greatest king. Even despite a notable character flaw in his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, David was commonly remembered as a righteous man "after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22) and a model recipient of God's grace and redemption. The monumental king is mentioned over a thousand times throughout the entire Bible and references to him are typically heard on the frequency of hagiographic praise. There is little doubt that Israel often reflected on David's kingship as a watershed moment in her history. In fact, theologian and historian Leon Wood noted that David "became the measure for evaluating succeeding kings."<sup>4</sup>

### **David the Warrior King**

Biblical literature portrays David as the greatest king ever to rule over Israel. First Samuel 16–31 describes David's ascent to the throne from young shepherd boy to ruler of Israel as a difficult path met with strife, betrayal, and turmoil. He began life as the son of Jesse, an obscure, Jewish shepherd who lived in the Palestinian countryside around the turn of the first millennium BCE. The young boy became a national hero with his underdog defeat of Goliath (1 Sam 17:48-50). David's victory over Israel's most feared enemy caught the attention of King Saul, who installed him as a military commander (1 Sam 18:5). Yet, conflict soon arose between the two. Earlier in David's life God had expressed his preference for David over Saul as his chosen king by sending the prophet Nathan to anoint the young boy (1 Sam 16:1-13). David is described as the Lord's anointed (מָשִׁיחַ), the title most frequently ascribed to Jesus Christ in the NT (Χριστός), the Lord's anointed (Ps 18:50; Luke 4:17-21). This theme of anointing pointed forward to the future Anointed One, the antitype of the kingly messiah with David as his prototype.

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<sup>4</sup>Leon J. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 239.

After a long and arduous struggle against Saul, David ascended to the throne and consolidated his power in Judah and Israel. As king of Israel, David led successful campaigns against the nations of Philistia, Ammon, Moab, Edom, Amalek, and Syria (2 Sam 8:11-15). Perhaps the crowning achievement of David's military career was the capture of Jerusalem (2 Sam 5:6-12) and its establishment as Israel's capital, a city that became widely known as the "city of David" (Neh 3:15). This honorific title encapsulated David's influence over his economic, governmental, and religious capital. David did what few thought possible. As a warrior, he took a powerless and divided minority community of Jews scattered throughout the Palestinian hills and forged them into an ancient Near Eastern seat of political power and wealth. He was the ideal king. No ruler before him nor after him could match David in prestige, admiration, and glory, with the exception of Israel's hope for a future "son of David." Esther Kellner notes: "The generations which followed looked upon him as the ideal king, and out of their memory of him came the hope and belief that one day the Lord would send them a 'son of David' who would restore to Israel the justice, kindness, religious devotion, and loving concern which, despite David's imperfections, had dominated his lengthy rule."<sup>5</sup>

### **David the Psalmist**

David is also famous for his artistic abilities as a skilled musician and song writer. His talents were codified and canonized into a large portion of the book of Psalms, which covered a sweeping panorama of David's relationship with God, his self-portrayal, and his messianic anticipation. David presented God as the omniscient (Ps 139:4-6, 17-18), omnipotent (Ps 33:6-9), omnipresent (Ps 139:7-12), creator and sustainer of the universe (Pss 8; 19). He is ultimately good (Ps 34:8),

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<sup>5</sup>Esther Kellner, *The Background of the Old Testament* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1963), 199.

righteous (Pss 11:7; 36:6; 145:7), just (Pss 33:5; 103:6; 140:12), faithful (Ps 145:17), gracious (Pss 103; 145:8), and loving (Pss 25:10; 33:5; 103:8). Yahweh is the God whom David called “my God” numerous times, shaping Israel’s conception of their God as an intimate and covenantal deity. It is to this personal Lord that David, during anguished states of emotion, confessed his sins and various iniquities (Pss 31:10; 32:5; 51:2), which allowed the reader to witness an honest portrayal of David’s heart. Themes of confession, restoration, and forgiveness are weaved through David’s confidence in God’s willingness to form the king’s character.

These types of psalms offered unparalleled access to understanding how David viewed himself. He is a grateful man, going from shepherd to king, guided by God’s protective hand (Pss 9:1; 26:7; 30:12; 86:2; 108:3). Further, he bade his readers to join him in his worshipful thanksgiving. David’s descendants responded by including his psalms as a prominent liturgical element of their festival worship (Pss 30:4; 33:2). In response to God’s mercy, David described himself humbly—as “poor” and “needy”—echoing God’s charge for Israel to have a wide, open hand toward the poor (Deut 15:11; cf. Pss 40:17; 86:1; 109:22). Despite being Israel’s greatest king, in sharp contrast to his foreign counterparts who claimed divine status, he presented himself in very human terms, as a man susceptible to weakness and injury. Consequently, he yearned for a future deliverance from a messianic redeemer. LDS theologian James Talmage (1862-1933) noted that many of David’s psalms pointed forward to a future fulfillment in Christ: “In the songs of David the psalmist abound in the oft-recurring allusion to the earthly life of Christ, many circumstances of which are described in detail, and, as to these, corroboration of the utterances is found in the New Testament scriptures.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2006), 44.

## **David the Progenitor to the Messiah**

Due to David's monumental influence on the Jewish identity, many began to think of him as the prototype of an eschatological ruler who would descend from the king's bloodline and ascend to his throne. This promise was made explicit through the covenant Yahweh made with David (2 Sam 7; 1 Chr 17; cf. Pss 89; 110; 132). The Davidic covenant established David's hereditary line and throne (2 Sam 7:12-16; 1 Chr 17:11-14) and forged a relationship between Yahweh and David's descendants, most notably a future father-son relationship (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13; Pss 2; 89:26-27). All Davidic kings were considered sons to Yahweh, mediated the covenant between God and his people, and pointed forward to the one, true Son of God who would rule over Israel in perfection. The divinely-established throne that David and his descendants occupied would last forever.

Texts such as Jeremiah 33:14-26, Psalm 89, and Isaiah 11:1-10 all pointed to a future heir to David's throne who would rule Israel, a hope the nation never surrendered. In the intertestamental work Psalms of Solomon 17, the author pleaded with God to raise up a king, "the son of David" (PsSal 17:21), who would destroy and judge the nations (PsSal 17:22-24, 29), reprove sin to bring his people to righteousness (PsSal 17:25-27), and reign forever (PsSal 17:32, 45). Much of Second Temple Judaism believed that Yahweh's promises to Abraham would come through David and his throne, located in Zion. The importance of David and the establishment of his throne was central to Israel's identity as God's covenant people.

Relatedly, the Qumran community carried on Davidic messianism in parallel, chronologically speaking, with their mormonic counterparts across the sea. The Qumran community existed between the second century BCE and first century CE, and, to a certain degree, serves as a non-biblical Jewish analog to the mormonic tribes. Unsurprisingly, David features prominently in the Qumranic literature. The apocryphal Psalm 151, long thought only to have existed in the LXX, was discovered

among the DSS (11QPsa) and is attributed to David. 4Q161 combined the messianic Davidic figure with the hope of an eschatological restoration of Israel, while 4Q174 presented him as one who would arise to save Israel and whose throne would be established for eternity. 4Q252 reiterates that this “Messiah of Righteousness” would come from the “Branch of David.”

The author of CD 5:1–6, when teaching ethics, cannot overlook David’s glaring moral blunder with Bathsheba. Yet, unlike the author of 2 Samuel, who recorded David’s affair as a matter of fact, the Qumran author, perhaps embarrassed by David’s sin, offered an excuse for the king, arguing that he may have been ignorant that the action would displease God because David had not read the sealed book of the law, which was stowed away in the ark.<sup>7</sup> In *The War of the Messiah*, the author controversially envisaged a wounded messiah from the “Branch of David.” 4Q504 described David as a princely shepherd over God’s covenant people, evidence that the Qumran community doubtless believed they were still included in the Davidic covenant with Yahweh despite immediate circumstances that seemed to beg the differ.

This covenant defined the Hebrew identity well into the NT era. Bridging the hereditary gap between Old and New Testament eras are two three-part genealogies of the Davidic line. The first is a three-part genealogy found in the last book of the Hebrew Bible that begins by depicting the origins of the Davidic king (1 Chr 1–2) and ends with the rather bleak prospect that the Davidic line would terminate when Israel was sent into exile (2 Chr 36:17–21). It is no accident, then, that the NT opens with the Matthean genealogy of the son of David, which is also presented in three sections, all including only fourteen descendants each (Matt 1:1–

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<sup>7</sup>Michael A. Knibb, *The Qumran Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 43.

17). In the Jewish practice of *gematria*, where each consonant in a word is assigned a numerical value, David's name amounts to  $\tau + \iota + \tau$  or  $4 + 6 + 4$ , equaling fourteen. These three sections of fourteen generations encapsulate the story and expectation of Israel—where David happens to be the fourteenth on the list—with David's name crowning all.<sup>8</sup>

### David in the New Testament

Much of the effort of the NT writers was spent convincing their readers that Jesus Christ was the messiah, the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant's promise that a true Son of God would come to establish David's throne forever. Luke announced the messiah's coming in Davidic terms: "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32). This news would have come as no surprise to believing and learned Jews since the scribes apparently taught that the messiah would be called the "Son of David" (Mark 12:35). In fact, it appears that "David" was the common answer to the catechetical question, "Whose son is the Christ?" (Matt 22:42). The messianic title "Son of David" was used by people throughout the synoptic Gospels. Blind men called out to the "Son of David" to be healed (Matt 20:30-31; Luke 18:35-43; Mark 10:46-47). Interestingly, those who most often called Jesus the "Son of David" in the synoptics were blind men who experienced healing; no doubt a stinging irony meant to convey Israel's inability to see her own messiah, a realization of the chiasmic verse of Isaiah 6:10 (see pg. 10).

A Canaanite woman implored the "Son of David" to exorcise her demon-possessed daughter (Matt 15:22), a significant gesture that, as LDS theologian James Talmage pointed out, "demonstrates her belief that He was the Messiah of Israel."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>I am indebted to my friend, David Kakish, for bringing this point to my attention.

<sup>9</sup>Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 334.

The Passover crowds in Jerusalem cried out, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” during his Triumphal Entry (Matt 21:9). On the cross—which marked the beginning of the Bible’s climactic event in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Davidic messiah—Christ quoted David from Psalm 22:1 by lamenting, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34) Additionally, he made use of Psalm 31 by crying out, “Into your hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46; Ps 31:5) The use of Davidic psalms was common practice throughout the Gospels. Together with Isaiah, the book of Psalms is the most extensively quoted and alluded OT source found in the NT as a whole, especially the Gospels.<sup>10</sup>

The book of Acts likewise demonstrates David’s influence over the early church. Peter’s famous Pentecost sermon in Acts 2, whereby thousands of Jews converted to faith in the Davidic messiah, quoted David as predicting the resurrection (Acts 2:25-28; Ps 15:8-11), then pointed to Christ’s ascension as the fulfillment of David’s prophecy that someone even greater than he would ascend to the heavens (Acts 2:29, 34; Ps 110:1). In a later event, Peter and John were released from arrest after testifying before the Jewish council. They subsequently praised God by quoting their “father David” (Acts 4:25-26; Ps 2:1-2). The apostles did not limit themselves to mere quotations of David in Acts. Paul preached that the resurrection provided assurance that those who are found in Christ are assured the “holy and sure blessings of David” (Acts 13:34). Like the Gospels, the book of Acts frequently quotes or alludes to Davidic psalms.<sup>11</sup>

Likewise, the influence of David on the epistles and Revelation cannot be overstated. Paul, Peter, John, and the author of Hebrews all quote or allude to

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<sup>10</sup>Matt 7:23 (Ps 6:8); 21:16 (Ps 8:1-2); 22:44 (Ps 110:1); 27:46 (Ps 22:1); Mark 12:36 (Ps 110:1); 15:34 (Ps 22:1); Luke 20:42-43 (Ps 110:1); 23:46 (Ps 31:5); John 2:17 (Ps 69:9); 13:18 (Ps 41:9); 15:25 (Ps 69:4); 19:24 (Ps 22:18), 36 (Ps 34:20).

<sup>11</sup>Acts 1:20 (Ps 69:25); 2:25-28 (Ps 16:8-11), 31 (Ps 16:10), 34-35 (Ps 110:1); 4:25-26 (Ps 2:1-2); 13:33 (Ps 2:7), 35 (Ps 16:10).

Davidic psalms, using them to buttress their interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in light of the new covenant. In fact, all epistle authors, with the exception of James and Jude, utilize Davidic psalms.<sup>12</sup> The book of Romans alone constitutes many of these references. In the letter, Paul's salutation identifies Christ as "descended from David," intimating that in Christ has arrived the long-awaited messiah from David's line, in whom the promises and blessings for which Israel had longed find their source and fulfillment (Rom 1:3; cf. 2Ti 2:8). Paul later called upon Psalm 32 to support his argument of salvation through grace and faith in full covenant community with God (Rom 4:4-8). Likewise, he used Psalm 69:22, an imprecatory plea from David against his enemies, to emphasize the graveness of Israel's lack of faith in God's covenant promises (Rom 11:9).

The author of Hebrews encouraged his audience to discover the greater Sabbath rest in Christ by quoting Psalm 95:7-8, drawing on David's plea for God's people to not harden their hearts (Heb 4:7). David is later lauded for his strong faith (Heb 11:32-34). John, in the book of Revelation, recorded an angel's pronouncement that Christ now holds "the key of David," the authority to exclude and admit people into God's kingdom (Rev 3:7). Additionally, John emphasized Christ's dual nature as both the divine Lord and Last Adam, or the "Root of David" and "descendant of David" (Rom 1:3; Rev 5:5; 22:16). He is both the "root and the descendant of David," the messianic, eschatological avenger, vindicator, and judge prefigured by David's reign (Rev 22:16).

It is obvious, then, that David was central to biblical Jewish identity. It was David, not his predecessor Saul, who founded and established the Hebrew

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<sup>12</sup>Rom 2:6 (Ps 62:12); 3:4 (Ps 51:4), 10-12 (Ps 14:1-3), 13 (Ps 5:9; 140:3), 18 (Ps 36:1); 4:7-8 (Ps 32:1-2); 10:18 (Ps 19:4); 11:9-10 (Ps 69:22-23); 15:3 (Ps 69:9), 9 (Ps 18:49); 1 Cor 10:26 (Ps 24:1); 15:27 (Ps 8:6); Eph 1:22 (Ps 8:6); 4:8 (Ps 68:18), 26 (Ps 4:4); Heb 1:5 (Ps 2:7), 13 (Ps 110:1); 2:6-8 (Ps 8:5-7), 12 (Ps 22:22); 3:7-11 (Ps 95:7-11), 15 (Ps 95:7-8); 4:3 (Ps 95:11), 5 (Ps 95:11), 7 (Ps 95:7-8); 5:5 (Ps 2:7), 6 (Ps 110:4); 7:21 (Ps 110:4); 10:5-7 (Ps 40:6-8); 1 Pe 2:3 (Ps 34:8), 10-12 (Ps 34:12-16); Rev 2:27 (Ps 2:9).

monarchy. David's psalms assumed a significant and enduring place in the cultural and religious memory of his people. Even Christ, the "Son of David," quoted two psalms from the cross that were written by his renown progenitor according to the flesh. The establishment of David's throne, a watershed moment for the power and influence of Israel, became a blueprint by which the future messiah would build his authority and power. The NT authors found this messianic hope in Jesus Christ, who was simultaneously and paradoxically David's descendant and Lord (Matt 22:41-45). Considering the foregoing, it is difficult to disagree with David Gelernter's conclusion that "the best-loved man in Israel's history is King David."<sup>13</sup>

### **David's Influence on the Mormonic Jewish Identity**

It is clear that King David emerged as a central feature of Hebrew identity, continuing through the intertestamental, Qumranic, and NT literature. As such, if the people in the BofM were truly Hebrew and intended to continue in their religious heritage, it is expected that their treatment of their greatest cultural king would bear some resemblance to his treatment in the Bible. However, this expectation is not the case. While the reader might anticipate numerous Davidic references from the Nephites, both direct and allusive, they are instead met with only seven references over a thousand years, spanning from the pre-exilic period to the fifth century CE. Furthermore, there are obvious difficulties related to six of the seven references. Three of them, while reverential in nature, are anachronistically imported from the King James Version of the Bible (2 Ne 17:2, 13; 19:7). Three others, though unique to the BofM, disparagingly chastise the beloved king (Jacob 1:15; 2:23, 24). The seventh is a passing mention of "the land of David" somewhere in the New World (Morm 2:5). Finally, the hope that the BofM was bestrewn with Davidic psalms must

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<sup>13</sup>David Gelernter, *Judaism: A Way of Being* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

be tempered by the probable fact that the Nephites lacked the book of Psalms—even potential allusions to them are difficult to detect.

### **Nephite-Isaianic Verses**

The book of 2 Nephi mentions David three times, twice speaking of the “house of David” (2 Ne 17:2, 13) and once of the “throne of David” (2 Ne 19:7). A cursory glance at these three verses offers BofM readers the deferential language they would expect from a Jew writing about David within one generation of departing Jerusalem in the sixth century BCE. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that these references are not unique to Nephi. The mormonic prophet explained that he intentionally copied them into his record from the book of Isaiah for the purpose of uplifting the hearts of his people for their joy (2 Ne 11:8). In fact, the entirety of 2 Nephi 12–24 is simply a copy of Isaiah 2–14. That Nephi copied Isaiah into his record is no cause for alarm; however, the BofM version of 2 Nephi 12–24 is not simply a translation of Isaiah 2–14, but a near-identical reproduction of the King James Version of Isaiah 2–14 (see table 1).

Table 1. A comparison of the relevant Isaianic and Nephite verses

KJV Isaiah	2 Nephi
And it was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind. (Isa 7:2)	And it was told the house of David, saying: Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind. (2 Ne 17:2)
And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? (Isa 7:13)	And he said: Hear ye now, O house of David; is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? (2 Ne 17:13)
Of the increase of his government and peace there <u>shall be</u> no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this. (Isa 9:7)	Of the increase of government and peace there <u>is</u> no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this. (2 Ne 19:7)

In these three examples all but one word (underlined) is identical. In 2 Nephi 19:7, the future-tense “shall be” is substituted for the present-tense form “is.” Such a change is noteworthy because it modifies the Davidic messianic prediction from future-tense to present-tense, perhaps indicating Nephi’s desire to demonstrate a present fulfillment of the Davidic messiah despite its actual fulfillment looming far into the future—an “already, not yet” tension.

Regardless of the theological reasons for this difference, the King James Versions of these three Isaianic verses have been copied exactly into the BofM. The obvious question immediately arises: How could Smith have translated a sixth-century BCE quotation from Isaiah that matched nearly identically to a seventeenth-century CE translation of the same? Naturally, if the BofM Isaiah were a true translation, then one would expect slight alterations in word choice between the BofM and KJV that result in different, albeit very similar, texts. The issue is even more problematic when one considers that lurking below the English translation of

the BofM is not Hebrew, but reformed Egyptian translated from Hebrew. Thus, Isaiah's words in the BofM went through two foreign languages, purportedly coming to Joseph Smith in reformed Egyptian (hence, the original Hebrew to reformed Egyptian to English), whereas Isaiah in the KJV went through only one (Hebrew to English). Yet, they still produced identical results.

This issue, dubbed the "Isaiah Problem" by LDS scholar Sidney B. Sperry, has not gone unnoticed. The KJV's presence in the BofM has acted as a magnet attracting criticism ever since the first skeptics spotted the apparent problem. They have long complained that the odds are too spectacular for Smith's nineteenth-century translation to duplicate the work of the KJV translators two centuries prior. They argue that the only reasonable explanation is plagiarism on the part of Smith. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, John Hyde, Jr. accused him of inserting "glaringly plagiarized"<sup>14</sup> portions of the Bible in the BofM.<sup>15</sup> Early LDS critic Eber D. Howe quipped that Smith, an "ignorant plagiarist," should have reworded the antiquated Jacobean language of KJV Isaiah into contemporary American English so that "there would have been more plausibility, and the deception not so easily detected."<sup>16</sup> To account for the slight differences between KJV Isaiah and BofM Isaiah, critics have postulated that Smith fraudulently emended verses here and there to create the illusion of novelty.

One of the first in-depth, scholarly attempts to reconcile the "Isaiah Problem" was undertaken by H. Grant Vest in 1938.<sup>17</sup> His thesis, supervised by

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<sup>14</sup>John Hyde, Jr., *Mormonism: Its Leaders and Designs* (New York: W. P. Fetridge & Co.: 1857), 282.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 234–36.

<sup>16</sup>Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, OH: Eber D. Howe, 1834), 39.

<sup>17</sup>H. Grant Vest, "The Problem of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon" (MA thesis, Brigham Young University, 1938)

Sidney B. Sperry (who also wrote on the topic), has largely remained the *de facto* solution, as evidenced by its 1995 republication in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*.<sup>18</sup> Initially, Sperry framed the problem within the wider issue of Isaianic authorship, which proposed disunity within the book of Isaiah itself in support of multiple authorship (Proto-, Deutero-, and Trito-Isaiah). Sperry ruled out the possibility that a multi-authored Isaiah could somehow affect the BofM by rejecting the hypothesis outright as “not proved,” thus subjugating the crux of the BofM’s “Isaiah Problem” to the likelihood of plagiarism.<sup>19</sup> His solution was to accept that Smith utilized the KJV during the BofM translation process; however, where the Nephite record (gold plates and reformed Egyptian) differed from the antiquated English Bible, Smith followed the recently excavated source to render a more faithful translation of Isaiah based on an ostensibly older and more reliable source.<sup>20</sup> For Sperry, the BofM reader must be comfortable with the fact that Smith liberally plagiarized the KJV. This anachronistic invasion into the text is, as LDS David P. Wright put it, “a basic fact that cannot be overlooked.”<sup>21</sup> Wright offered his own solution by opining that Smith, being a product of Second Great Awakening revivalism, may have used Isaiah in the typical “revivalist tradition,” believing that Scripture was available for repurposing through personal, divine interpretation.<sup>22</sup>

For the purpose of this thesis, however, Sperry’s solution to the “Isaiah Problem” does little to prevent the disqualification of the three Nephite-Isaianic

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<sup>18</sup>Sidney B. Sperry, “The ‘Isaiah Problem’ in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4, no. 1 (1995): 129–52.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>21</sup>David P. Wright, “Joseph Smith’s Interpretation of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31, no. 4 (1998): 182.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 206.

verses of David as uniquely mormonic. They are Isaiah's words, not Nephi's words; they are biblical, not mormonic. Nevertheless, they demonstrate that Nephi was aware of David and recognized his role in the messianic anticipation of the OT, which lends some credibility toward the BofM historicist hypothesis. Yet, on the other hand, it must be noted that these three Isaianic imports represent the only time Nephi mentions David in any of his writings, which seems atypical of a Hebrew prophet, especially if he has any messianic interests.

A comparative case study may be drawn between Nephi's discourse in 2 Nephi 11–33 and Paul's sermon in Acts 13. Both men spoke on the subject of Christ and utilized the OT's witness of him. Nephi referred to David three times in 2 Nephi 11–33, all of which were quoted from the OT (2 Ne 17:2, 13; 19:7). Paul mentioned David four times in Acts 13, two of which were OT quotes: once from Psalm 89:20 (Acts 13:22) and another from Isaiah 55:3 (Acts 13:34). However, unlike Nephi, Paul uniquely spoke of David outside of his quotations from the OT (Acts 13:36–37). Paul not only referenced OT sources that included David, but he also called upon David by name in his sermon to elaborate on Davidic messianism. Nephi, while sensing the importance of David, neglected to do the same. He simply quoted Isaiah's remarks concerning David. In fact, had Isaiah not mentioned David in those three verses, one wonders if Nephi would have ever mentioned the king at all, and the near-absence of Davidic references outside of this section in the BofM inclines one to suppose he would not have.

In sum, the first three of seven references to David in the BofM are non-unique, plagiarized imports from KJV Isaiah. Regardless, the Nephite-Isaianic verses provide evidence that the Nephites at least had knowledge of David and his importance to their messianic expectation, as Isaiah had before them. Consequently, one might expect to see continued references to the king throughout the BofM as one sees in the Bible.

## David the Polygamist

The next references to David are found in the book of Jacob (1:15; 2:23, 24). In the narrative, the prophet-king Nephi died and passed on the responsibility of recordkeeping to his younger brother, Jacob (Jacob 1:1-4, 12). By this time, Lehi's descendants had split into two major factions: the Nephites, those loyal to righteous Nephi, and the Lamanites, those who were hostile to the Nephites (Jacob 1:14). Jacob felt compelled to take up the prophetic mantle of his older brother and called his fellow Nephites to repentance since they had begun to "indulge themselves somewhat in wicked practices, such as like unto David of old desiring many wives and concubines, and also Solomon, his son" (Jacob 1:15). For Jacob, the practice of polygamy was reprehensible, and David served as a prime example. He would later call David's sin a "grosser crime," and accused the Nephites of practicing polygamy because they did not understand the Scriptures (Jacob 2:23), which serves as an interesting contrast to the Qumranic author's excuse for David's same sin for the same reason (CD 5:1-6). Where the Qumran community was willing to forgive David's ignorance of the law, Jacob was unwilling to extend the same excuse for the Nephites. In fact, he further lamented: "for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son. Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord" (Jacob 2:23-24).

Consequently, Jacob departed from OT writers who recorded David's polygamous marriages matter-of-factly. We are told that David's first wife, Michal, was the daughter of Saul (1 Sam 18:27). Michal later bigamously married Palti of Gallim under order of her father (1 Sam 25:44), but eventually was reunited with her first husband (2 Sam 3:14-15). David also married Abigail, Ahinoam, Maacah, Haggith, Abital, and Eglah (2 Sam 3:2-5). In addition to these wives David also married other women and kept a harem of concubines (2 Sam 5:13). While the

biblical authors record this information, they never chastise the king for his polygamy. The one exception to this observation was David's adultery, not polygamy.

David's love affair with Bathsheba was a stain on his legacy. He seduced the woman, married to Uriah the Hittite, after watching her bathe (2 Sam 11:2-4). Bathsheba became pregnant, and in an attempt to conceal the affair David pulled Uriah off the battlefield in anticipation that he would lay with his wife and assume the child was his (2 Sam 11:5-8). Yet, Uriah's steadfast resolve to maintain the warrior ethos caused the plan to fail. After he refused to lie with his wife (2 Sam 11:9-13) David pugnaciously altered the scheme by sending Uriah back to the battlefield and intentionally placed him in harm's way where he was killed in action (2 Sam 11:14-21). After a period of mourning for her late husband, Bathsheba joined David in his palace and became another one of his wives (2 Sam 11:27).

The Chronicler, eager to produce a more hagiographical representation of his king, completely ignores David's affair with Bathsheba, although he mentions the king's polygamous marriages (1 Chr 14:3). Despite including Bathsheba in his account, the author of 1 Kings nonetheless praises David as having kept God's commandments (1 Kgs 14:8). Only 2 Samuel offers a critical look into the Bathsheba affair, noting that the sexual encounter displeased God (2 Sam 11:27). It was considered David's greatest sin with Psalm 51 written as repentance. Yet, despite the gravity of his sin, no biblical author offered the kind of disparaging censure seen in the book of Jacob. David criticized himself for his sin, confessing his own transgressions and evil deeds before God (Ps 51:3-4). The biblical authors were quick to juxtapose David's polygamy in light of his achievements. Jacob, however, uncharacteristically pronounced judgment on David without mentioning the king's accomplishments.

In sum, Jacob offers a discordant portrayal of David that the biblical authors, especially the Chronicler, would likely not endorse. Jacob's treatment of

David recasted him from a venerable “man after God’s own heart” to a lustful, unctuous king who committed polygamous abominations before Yahweh.

### **The Land of David**

The final reference to David in the BofM is a reference to a geographic region, the “land of David,” apparently named in honor of the king (Morm 2:5). The second chapter of the book of Mormon—not to be confused with the collective narrative *Book of Mormon* under the same name—opens with a harrowing tale of the continual war between the Nephites and Lamanites. The Nephites experienced a series of defeats under the command of Mormon, the book’s author. The Nephite army initially secured the city of Angola, only to be chased out shortly thereafter (Morm 2:4). From the city of Angola, the Nephites were driven to the “land of David” (Morm 2:5). From the land of David, they sought solace in the “land of Joshua,” but were unable to remain there long (Morm 2:6).

Presumably, the very existence of this eponym speaks to the mormonic appreciation of the Israelite king, but likewise suggests that he does not hold any more significance than Joshua or any other biblical or mormonic characters in this respect. Naming places after famous figures was not only a common biblical practice: e.g., Israel, Benjamin, Judah, etc., but was also a common mormonic practice: e.g., land of Nephi (Mosiah 23:38), Amulon (Mosiah 24:1), Helam (Mosiah 23:38), Zarahemla (Mosiah 25:6), Lehi-Nephi (Mosiah 7:1), Ishmael (Alma 21:18), etc. Thus, it only follows that naming an area after a biblical figure in the New World follows expectations of Jewish practices. This observation, of course, is assuming that the “land of David” was named after the biblical David, which appears to be a safe assumption given its proximity to an area named after another biblical warrior-hero, “land of Joshua.” Otherwise, it is merely a coincidence that David and Joshua

happen to appear in geographic proximity to one another, and were named after non-biblical individuals who bear the names of popular Hebrew figures.

### **Potential Psalmic Allusions**

As previously noted, King David is well-known as a prolific psalmist. The NT writers frequently quoted or alluded to Davidic psalms, which profoundly influenced the shaping of the biblical Jewish and NT Christian identities. One need not look further than Christ's famous quotation of Psalm 22 from the cross, or Paul's recitation of Psalm 2 in his Acts 13 sermon, to recognize this fact. Interestingly, the mormonic Hebrew Bible appears not to have contained the book of Psalms or any other "wisdom literature." The Plates of Laban retrieved by Nephi in Jerusalem essentially contained "the record of the Jews" (1 Ne 5:6) in its pre-exilic form: the Torah (1 Ne 5:11), the historical works of Joshua through 2 Chronicles (1 Ne 5:12), "prophecies of holy prophets" (1 Ne 5:13), "many prophecies which have been spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah" (1 Ne 5:13), and non-canonical prophecies by Joseph in Egypt (2 Ne 4:1-2). Nephi does not mention any wisdom literature typically associated with ancient Hebrew writings. Consequently, it is unknown whether or not any of the Psalms, including Davidic psalms, made it to the New World.

An obvious objection against the BofM historicism hypothesis could be raised at this point: if the Psalms were so important to biblical Jews, why did the mormonic Jews neglect to bring them along to the promised land? Naturally, this argument is made from silence—simply because Nephi did not mention them in the mormonic Hebrew canon does not mean they were not included. However, the fact that the BofM never quotes a single Psalm invites the reader to assume the author's ignorance of them. To account for this, LDS scholar John Hilton III has proposed that even though Nephi did not possess a written form of the psalmic material, he

may have been familiar enough with some Psalms based on temple worship to integrate them into his writing.<sup>23</sup> In all, Hilton believed he had discovered 43 textual allusions to the book of Psalms, many of which are attributed to David.

Hilton himself admits the near insurmountable handicap of proving that these allusions are psalmic in nature. He noted that it is “difficult to discern whether textual similarities are intentional or coincidental.”<sup>24</sup> To take it a bit further, without knowledge of whether or not the mormonic authors possessed the book of Psalms effectively extinguishes our ability to uncover any allusion with certainty. At best, only echoes of their psalmic knowledge are detectable. Hilton’s list of what he believed are faint echoes include examples such as; “from everlasting to everlasting” (Moro 7:22; Pss 90:2; 103:17; 106:48), “the rock of salvation” (2 Ne 9:45; Pss 62:7; 89:26; 95:1), and “the depths of the earth” (2 Ne 26:5; 3 Ne 9:6, 8; 28:20; Ps 71:20).<sup>25</sup>

Yet, these kinds of phrases seem far too conventional to offer persuasive evidence that mormonic authors had the Psalms in mind when they were writing them. Hilton’s phrases just as easily lend credibility to the competing argument that a nineteenth-century author could have been familiar enough with the language of the KJV or contemporary preaching and writing that it influenced his style while writing the BofM. For example, the phrase “pains of hell” was a common colloquialism used by popular figures such as John Bunyan and George Whitfield, both of whom would have been well-known to nineteenth-century Americans. The fact that the phrase only appears once in the entire KJV Bible (Ps 116:3), but multiple times in the BofM (Jacob 3:11; Alma 14:6; 26:13; 36:13), indicates that the

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<sup>23</sup>John Hilton III, “Old Testament Psalms in the Book of Mormon,” in *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament*, ed. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, Matthew J. Grey, and David Rolph Seely (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2013), 292.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 294-96.

BofM was influenced more by the frequent nineteenth-century use of the phrase rather than ancient writers alluding to the original psalmic expression.

Furthermore, the supposed psalmic allusions Hilton brought forward align with the KJV, which is a serious concern for his hypothesis. As with the “Isaiah Problem,” these ancient echoes of the Psalms are translated in the same manner as a seventeenth-century English translation, often word-for-word. For example, Hilton cites the following phrase from Jacob 6:6; “today if ye will hear his voice harden not your hearts.” If this truly is a psalmic allusion, then it is an obvious reproduction of the KJV Psalm 95:7-8, “Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart.” Likewise, the phrase “none that doeth good . . . no not one” in Moroni 10:25 matches exactly with both the KJV Psalms 14:3; 53:3 and Romans 3:12, stepping beyond the mere repurposing of OT Psalms and into the NT Epistles as well. This observation would not come as a surprise to Hilton. In fact, the identical reproduction of the KJV Psalms in the BofM is the reason he found these supposed psalmic allusions in the first place (by running word analysis software).<sup>26</sup>

Yet, once again, as with the “Isaiah Problem,” the reader is left to answer a pointed question about Hilton’s proposed allusions as to which is more likely. Is it likely that Moroni, having been raised in mormonic Jewish culture without a copy of the book of Psalms for nearly a millennium, in the fifth century CE suddenly alluded to the Psalms, by writing in non-extant “reformed Egyptian,” words that happen to be translated into English in the nineteenth century by Joseph Smith as, “none that doeth good . . . no not one (Moro 10:25),” a verbatim copy of the KJV translation of Psalms 14:3; 53:3 and Romans 3:12? Or is it more likely that a nineteenth-century author drew from his knowledge of the KJV translation to construct Moroni’s epistle?

Ultimately, Hilton’s proposal, while interesting, is unconvincing and does

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<sup>26</sup>Hilton, “Old Testament Psalms,” 293.

little to advance the historicist's cause. More convincing evidence might come from a claim that the book of Psalms was listed in the canon of (or supplemental to) the Plates of Laban, or the presence of psalmic quotations throughout the BofM similar to the NT's use of the Psalms, and these in a nineteenth-century American English that would have been at Smith's command. However, what we, in truth, find is no such listing of the book of Psalms as a part of the Hebrew writings supposedly taken from Jerusalem by this fleeing sixth-century BCE missing tribe of Israelites, nor unproblematic allusions in the BofM to the Psalms, whose only echoes are found in a few scattered verbatim KJV quotations.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

Many BofM historicists have turned their attention away from the barren prospect of discovering external, archeological evidences to support their thesis, to explore a new frontier in the hope of establishing the book's historicity via internal evidences by teasing out potential underlying Hebraic elements to the English text—the only form in which it appears. By presupposing the truth of its claim to an underlying “reformed Egyptian” source, itself a translation of biblical Hebrew, BofM historicists cut a hermeneutical lens they believe reveals the kind of evidence for which they are searching. Yet, this lens also has the ability of producing a competing narrative that testifies against the BofM's authenticity.

Given its ostensible Hebrew textual tradition and background, the BofM is curiously sparse in its reference to David. Unlike the Bible, the BofM boasts no unique messianic prophecies that specifically mention David; rather, in three places, it borrows from Isaiah's Davidic prophecies word-for-word from the KJV. Furthermore, the BofM does not present David in the same adulatory tone as the Bible. Instead, it fixates on the ancient monarch's practice of polygamy as a sinful abomination, which was downplayed by the biblical authors (with the notable exception of Bathsheba) and Qumran community. The single glimpse we receive of a unique Nephite honor to their ancestral king is a passing mention of the “land of David” in the New World, which comes immediately before another biblical warrior-hero, Joshua, who received the same honor. Relatedly, while some attempt has been made to uncover psalmic allusions in the BofM, such problematic claims bear the same burden of proof as the plagiarized quotations of Isaiah in 2 Nephi.

If the BofM was written by pre- and post-exilic Jews, why are its references to David so rare and atypical when compared to other Jewish texts such as the Old and New Testaments, intertestamental writings, and Qumranic literature? The mormonic treatment of David is inconsistent with what would be expected, given the religious background, texts, and culture from which they claim to have arisen. The venerated Israelite king is nowhere near as prevalent or, in the case of Jacob, esteemed in the BofM when compared to his monumental significance in the Bible and other related Jewish texts, especially in self-consciously messianic movements like those in Qumran or the NT. Consequently, I contend the BofM's peculiar treatment of David in particular testifies against the BofM historicist hypothesis—that it is the product of a historically authentic, Hebrew culture—because it so radically truncates and departs from the known Hebrew literary tradition concerning the great Israelite king. It appears highly suspect that the mormonic prophets and preachers and kings, seeking to continue the heritage of their Old World cousins and promote a messianic tradition comparable to the NT tradition, all but exclude David from their national, historio-religious records, nor situate him honorably among their cultural heroes.

In the absence of any convincing evidence for these incredible BofM historicist claims, we are nevertheless asked to believe that sometime in the sixth century BCE a lost Israelite tribe emigrated from Palestine to the New World with the intent of preserving OT Hebrew messianism, yet without the type or frequency of Davidic references found with their ancestral, Old World cousins. In the end, this desperate search for internal evidences in support of an underlying Hebrew tradition to BofM, as with the search for corroborating external evidences to its supposed ancient historicity, is destined to amount to unproductive digging in the sand. Consequently, I predict that pressing the BofM further in this way will yield similar results.

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## ABSTRACT

### DAVIDIC REFERENCES IN THE BOOK OF MORMON AS EVIDENCE AGAINST ITS HISTORICITY

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This thesis critiques contemporary Latter-day Saint scholarly efforts to validate the historicity of the Book of Mormon through textual criticism by presupposing its historic authenticity, then combing the text for evidence of literary elements that may suggest ancient Hebrew authorship. Chapter 2 surveys current Latter-day Saint scholarship and arguments for internal evidence in support of the historicity of the Book of Mormon.

Chapter 3 assesses the importance of King David's influence over the biblical and non-biblical Hebrew cultural and religious identity to determine the likelihood and anticipated portrayal of the king's appearance in the Book of Mormon. Given the Book of Mormon's scant and peculiar nature of references to the fabled king, this chapter also argues that a competing testimony against the book's historicity is produced. Chapter 4 offers concluding remarks.

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