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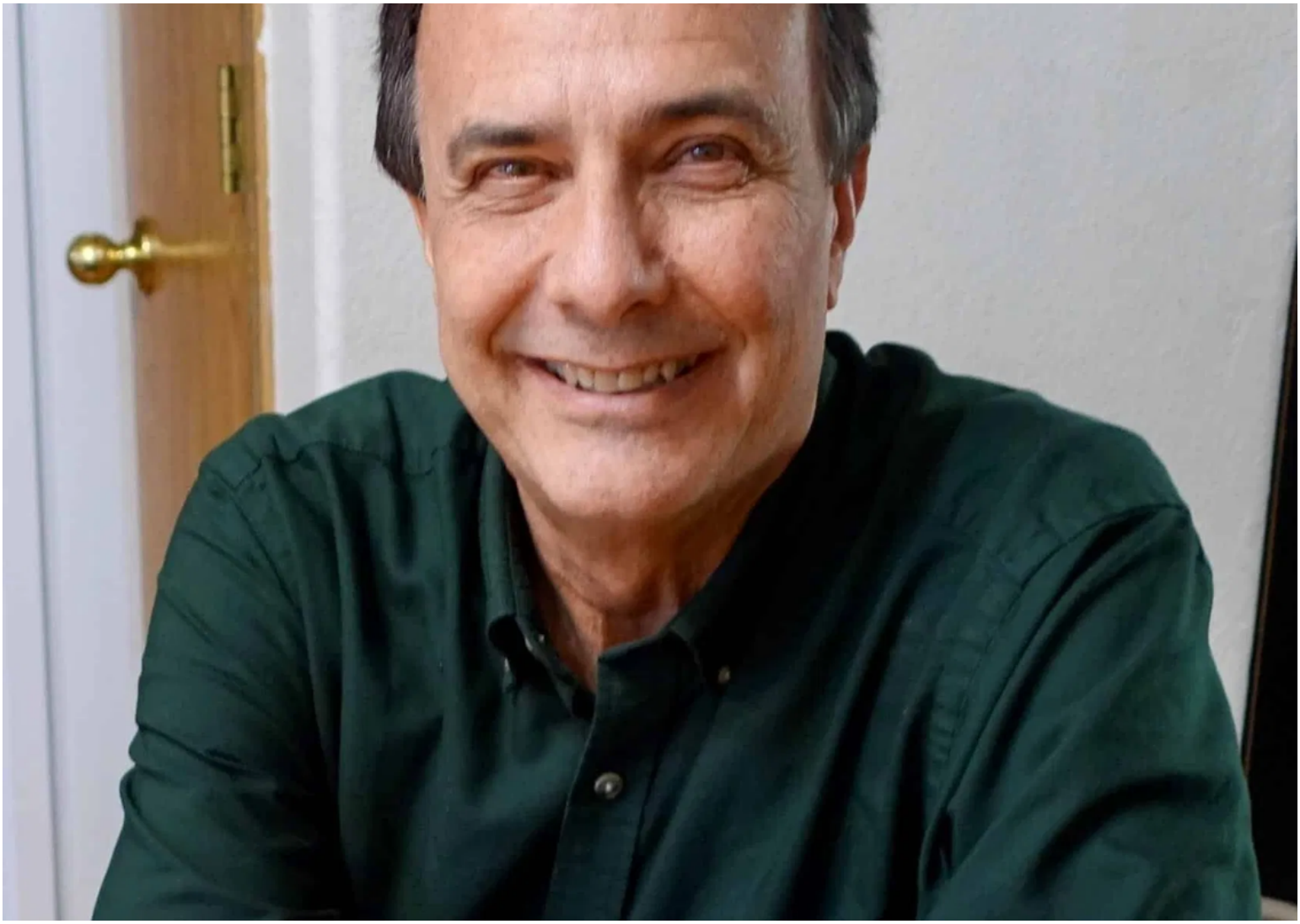
of Kurt Manwaring



SEPTEMBER 14, 2020 BY KURT MANWARING

10 Questions with Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

Sponsored by BYU Studies | Jeffrey M. Bradshaw breaks down some of today's most important questions from the Pearl of Great Price and introduces the 2020 Interpreter Foundation conference, "Tracing Ancient Threads in the Book of Moses."

Who is Jeffrey M. Bradshaw?

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw: I have loved the scriptures since I was a young child. The stories of Genesis especially captivated me. And that's where it all began. Though I've tried for nearly two decades to devote more time to the later chapters of Genesis, I can't seem to get much further than the Book of Moses. I am still finding new things in it to love, and still sense that there is more to the stories than I can fully fathom.

By a series of flukes and missteps I ended up professionally as a cognitive scientist, with a focus on human and machine cognition and collaboration. I wouldn't trade my job for any other. But I have to admit that looking backwards at the sacred past through the eyes of scripture is a happy contrast to the fast-paced, forward-looking rat race of scientific research that requires discarding daily what I thought I knew yesterday.

I like the fact that scientific and scriptural research both require concentration, attention to detail, competence across diverse disciplines, and a constant need for invention and reinvention that naturally fosters humility and wonder. But, more important than these attractions, there is a spiritual satisfaction I get from scripture study that does not compare to anything else in my life.

That does not mean that scripture study trumps the love I have for my extraordinary wife, the shared joys and burdens of growing together with our family, the power of the ordinances, or wholehearted engagement as part of a living community of Saints that seeks to serve in a spirit of consecration. It just means that I treasure the privilege of the one-on-one spiritual communion with the Lord that comes daily through study and

prayer, and recognize that the nourishment, enlightenment, and direction He provides through these means is the wellspring of everything else I do.

What are the biggest questions in Book of Moses studies today?

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw: For many years, Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible (JST) was little discussed and understood by Church members. Everything I knew about the JST as a young boy came from a copy of a little orange booklet by Merrill Y. Van Wagoner adapted from a series of *Improvement Era* articles in 1940. It sat on my parents' bookshelf next to a copy of the *Inspired Version*. I read and re-read it for many years.

After Robert J. Matthews published his thorough study of the JST in 1975 and excerpts were eventually included in the Latter-day Saint edition of the Bible, there was a flurry of interest by Church members and scholars. But that soon died down again.

Recently, however, there has been something of a revival of interest in JST studies. Many important articles and books are now appearing, and people are asking good questions about the JST, from which the Book of Moses was excerpted.

Some of the most common questions about the Book of Moses are similar to ones being asked about other works of Latter-day Saint scripture:

- What do we know of its nineteenth-century background and origins?
- How was it translated? Do the characters and stories have any historical basis?
- How do we account for biblical language and ideas, including explicit prophecies of the life and teaching of Christ that claim to pre-date the New Testament?

Other questions are unique to the Book of Moses. For example, because the Book of Moses, like Genesis, discusses human origins and the creation of the universe, we want

to know whether its views are compatible with science. And because a somewhat different version of the Book of Moses story of the Creation and the Fall is part of the Latter-day Saint temple endowment, we want to learn more about the relationship of this story to the richly symbolic liturgy and layout of ancient and modern temples.

A resource responding to several common questions about the Book of Moses can be found on the Pearl of Great Price Central and Interpreter websites.

Some of the biggest questions about Latter-day Saint scriptures have always had to do with their origins and sources. For example, how do his translations and revelations relate to Joseph Smith's nineteenth-century environment, to texts that he may have known, and to the ancient world? How do you approach such questions?

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw: I believe that many of these questions can be addressed through what is generally called *comparative research*.

Though comparative research draws on a wide variety of types of evidence, its primary goal is to look carefully at historical and literary relationships among a primary text of interest and other relevant texts to determine whether or not similarities and differences provide evidence either of influence or of common origins.

For example, ongoing discoveries about ancient Enoch texts about Enoch have enabled scholars to identify traces of their influence in several scattered New Testament

passages. And by comparing similarities and differences among the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke researchers long ago concluded that all three of them draw in large measure on an older, common source.

Importantly, such research not only provides clues to origins and influences but also frequently illuminates the meaning of both the primary text of interest and the texts to which it is being compared.

For example, as part of a comparative study of Moses 1, a seemingly gratuitous and initially inexplicable phrase stood out in verse 27: “as the voice was still speaking.”

Surprisingly, we found that an important first-century pseudepigraphal text named the *Apocalypse of Abraham* repeated similar phrases in analogous contexts. This discovery provided a welcome clue to a possible meaning of this obscure phrase in both texts — a finding we will describe in our presentation at the upcoming conference on *Ancient Threads in the Book of Moses*.

There are a variety of comparative approaches that can be used to understand the texts and translations of modern scripture. For example, some comparative studies seek to identify instances when Joseph Smith drew on the Bible and other resources *known* to him as aids in translation. Other studies analyze intertextuality between the Bible and modern scripture with the goal of recognizing and understanding the interplay of these texts, while often setting aside questions about the translation process.

In the upcoming Book of Moses conference the focus will be on comparing Latter-day Saint scripture with ancient sources that Joseph Smith could *not* have known. When conducted with careful methodological controls, such studies can be used to support arguments that the Prophet translated through a process that depended on divine revelation.

It is evident that these different realms of comparative study should not be pursued in isolation. Though scholars naturally gravitate toward favorite specialties, I think it is a mistake to over-specialize.

I am in awe of researchers who seem to be adept at drawing on all the relevant disciplines, including but not limited to what I see as three basic areas:

1. The background, early history, and teachings of the Restored Church of Jesus Christ;
2. Relevant languages, cultures, and traditions of the ancient world; and
3. The invaluable tools of textual criticism and literary analysis.

To the degree we lack familiarity with past and current research in any one of these allied fields, there are important matters to which we will inevitably remain blind.

For example, to the extent we have failed to master 19th-century Church history and teachings we will not discover immediate connections and influences among events and texts contemporary to the translation process.

Likewise, without expertise in writings and backgrounds of the ancient world we will fail to see significant evidence of lost history and truths that have been recovered in modern scripture.

No less important, if we have not learned to read, analyze and compare the literary features of texts in a careful manner, we will remain blithely ignorant of significant details of structure and vocabulary that sometimes provide unique clues to understanding.

Could you say more about the upcoming conference, *Tracing Ancient Threads in the Book of Moses?*

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw: Beginning in the 1970s, a few scholars, most notably Hugh W. Nibley, began to point to evidence relating to the ancient context of the Book of Moses. However, over-enthusiastic researchers (admittedly, at times, including myself) have not

always been careful in their studies and sometimes have gone farther in their claims than the evidence has warranted.

As a result of this and other factors, some of the early enthusiasm for comparative studies has waned in the last few decades and, paralleling the course of biblical studies, the pendulum has swung to the other extreme where comparisons of scripture to the ancient world have become less common today than they once were.

Now the pendulum is swinging back the other way again. Most researchers recognize that it is a mistake to reject the idea of comparative study outright. As Todd Compton explained: “Drawing parallels is a necessary technique for any scholar; one must simply judge each parallel separately to see what validity it offers,” recognizing that “this technique requires careful analysis of the passages to be compared.”

George Nickelsburg had it right, I think, when he wrote about the careful balance needed in evaluating evidence of antiquity for traditions preserved in extracanonical literature: “One should not simply posit what is convenient with the claim that later texts reflected earlier tradition. At the same time, thoroughgoing skepticism is inconsonant with the facts as we know them and as new discoveries continue to reveal them: extant texts represent only a fragment of the written and oral tradition that once existed. Caution, honest scholarly tentativeness, and careful methodology remain the best approach to the data.”

I also appreciate J. J. M. Roberts’ assessment of the value of comparative analysis. He noted that although it “has never proven a particular interpretation, it has certainly ruled out some and suggested others.”

We hope that the presentations at the conference will reflect the still increasing maturity of the field, relying on more well-defined methodologies designed to better assure the reliability of their results—avoiding the extremes of both parallelomania and parallelophobia.

In addition to more well-defined methodologies, recent research has also benefited

from new discoveries and better understandings of the manuscripts and other material remains of the cultures and religious traditions of the ancient Near East.

The conference is based on the premise that significant patterns of resemblance to ancient manuscripts not available during the lifetime of Joseph Smith and of unexpected conformance to conditions imposed by an archaic setting are potential indicators of antiquity that are best explained when the essential element of divine revelation is acknowledged.

The events will take place on the evening of Friday, September 18 and throughout the day of September 19.

The Friday night keynote will be given by Elder Bruce C. Hafen and Sister Marie K. Hafen. They will set the tone for the remainder of the program as they discuss their views about the antiquity of the Book of Moses. They will share their insights as former president and matron of the St. George Utah temple on how the story of Adam and Eve is inseparably connected with the Atonement of Jesus Christ within modern temple ordinances.

On Saturday, a full-day program of new research will follow. The program will include:

- A launch announcement from Pearl of Great Price Central (Ryan Dahle);
- A close comparison of the visions of Moses (Moses 1) to an ancient account of Abraham's "heavenly ascent" (Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David J. Larsen, and Stephen T. Whitlock);
- The discovery of scriptural passages that indicate the possibility of ancient roots for the Book of Moses in the brass plates (Noel Reynolds and Jeff Lindsay);
- An analysis of the many references to the divine "word" in the Book of Moses (Matthew L. Bowen);
- An exploration of temple and priestly themes in the Book of Moses that are consistent with Moses' identity as a Levite (John W. Welch and Jackson Abhau);
- A survey of evidence showing that the Book of Moses restores doctrines relating to the Great Plan of Happiness once taught by early Christians were lost when Augustine

reshaped Christian theology (Terryl L. Givens);
- An examination of the similarities and differences between the story of Adam and Eve after they left the Garden of Eden (Moses 5:1-15) and texts outside the Bible, suggesting a common background in ritual for some of these texts (David Calabro);
- A comparison of the account of Enoch in Moses 6-7 with Enoch traditions outside of scripture (Jared Ludlow).

The conference is co-sponsored and co-organized by The Interpreter Foundation (myself), BYU Department of Ancient Scripture (David R. Seely), Book of Mormon Central (John W. Welch), and FairMormon (Scott Gordon). On Friday evening, our session chair will be Daniel C. Peterson, and on Saturday that role will be filled by Jasmin Gimenez Rappleye and Kent P. Jackson.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the conference program will be available through live-streaming only. More details are available here as well as on the Book of Mormon Central and FairMormon websites.

Why is it important to know that the Book of Moses has ancient roots?

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw: To answer that question, let me quote from the conference description:

While imperfections in the Bible will not greatly disturb or surprise most Latter-day Saints, their belief that the principal events and people described in modern scripture have a basis in history and revelation is of great consequence to their faith. How so?

- **First**, Joseph Smith claimed to have met and conversed with many of these individuals, including Moses;
- **Second**, many ancient figures mentioned in modern scripture are presented at face

value as historical individuals in historical settings;

- **Finally**, and most importantly, some of these individuals are recorded as having personally transmitted priesthood authority and keys to Joseph Smith.

It is true, of course, as Joseph Spencer, Adam Miller, and David Bokovoy have argued, that Latter-day Saint scripture transcends history as it enables the reader to step into scripture and experience sacred history anew. In particular, as I have outlined elsewhere, I am very much a proponent of James E. Faulconer's view of scripture as "incarnation," and his perspective on what it means for the history of scripture to be "literal" in the sense that premoderns seem to have understood it as opposed to the journalistic criteria of clinical accuracy with which we moderns are familiar.

Of course, I am also aware that the historicity of key ancient figures and their stories in the Bible can only rarely be convincingly established by historical and archaeological methods alone.

But it must be said also that history and archaeology can rarely, on their own, convincingly rule out the reality of individuals from antiquity.

In his most recent publications, David Bokovoy has not only questioned the idea of ancient roots for the Book of Moses but also thrown doubt on the idea that prominent Old Testament characters such as Moses and Abraham were historical figures of the material past. How do you respond to such arguments?

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw: I would like to start by saying that

there are many things to admire in Bokovoy's writings, especially within his erudite book, *Authoring the Old Testament*. Readers will savor the sections of the book in which Bokovoy highlights selected passages providing evidence of inspiration in the Books of Moses and Abraham, giving examples of significant links with both ancient conceptions of religion and modern Latter-day Saint beliefs.

Bokovoy discusses the Book of Moses as a temple text, featuring biblical and temple motifs that prefigure the Nauvoo endowment. He also explores additional connections with Near Eastern traditions, including the ideas of how Moses was granted authority to control the waters in the likeness of God, the reference to God as a "Man of Council," and its resonances with the divine council in Israelite theology, elaborations about the cursing of the earth in the Book of Moses stories of Cain and Enoch, and concepts about the nature of God that not only "restored ancient truth" but also "build upon and enhance earlier historical constructs."

I also agree with the general argument that one form or another of the various versions of the Documentary Hypothesis is the best explanation for the Bible as we have it today. He has done a wonderful job of bringing this complex material together in a form that readers can easily understand.

The Documentary Hypothesis relies on impressive array of evidences for the seeming diversity of sources within the first five books of the Bible. Though no doubt differing with Bokovoy in some of the details of his views, many if not most contemporary Latter-day Saint biblical scholars accept the general idea in some form.

(The state-of-play in Latter-day Saint scripture scholarship is best explored in a well-considered and nuanced fashion in David Rolph Seely's 2016 *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* essay "'We Believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly': Latter-day Saints and historical biblical criticism.")

The notion that a series of individuals may have had a hand in the authorship and

redaction of Genesis should not be foreign to readers of the Book of Mormon, where inspired editors have explicitly revealed the process by which they wove separate overlapping records into the finished scriptural narrative.

However, even those who find the Documentary Hypothesis compelling have good reason to admire the resulting literary product on its own terms. For example, the most able popular expositor of the Documentary Hypothesis, Richard Friedman, writes that in the scriptural version of Genesis we have a text "that is greater than the sum of its parts."

John Sailhamer also expresses admiration for the ability of the ancient editors of Genesis, remarking that despite the "noticeable lack of uniformity," there is an "easily discernible unity."

Of course, in contrast to the carefully controlled prophetic redaction of the Book of Mormon, we do not know how much of the writing and editing of the Old Testament may have taken place with less inspiration and authority. And although the processes of selection, transmission, and translation of ancient scripture were doubtless divinely guided in at least some respects, these long and complex processes appear not to have been wholly accomplished under prophetic supervision.

In light of problems such as these, Bokovoy proposes two options for believing Latter-day Saints. He writes that they may either (1) "assume that these were historical figures whose stories, as told in the Hebrew Bible, reflect early Israelite and Near Eastern oral traditions incorporated into the documentary sources"; or, alternatively, (2) they may "assume that some of these men were *not* historical figures of the material past, and rather than having the purpose of providing a chronological record of the past, with scripture God uses ideas, assumptions, mythology, and even foreign texts to help us establish a relationship with Him and others."

In light of Bokovoy's subsequent writings, it is clear that he has come to favor option two. Having concluded that Joseph Smith created modern scripture wholly from a combination of textual borrowings and his own imagination, Bokovoy applies the term

"pseudepigrapha" (as well as the gentler term "midrash") to the Book of Moses. The term "pseudepigrapha" (literally "with false superscription") refers to religious writings that are typically attributed to prominent Old Testament figures but that almost certainly did not originate with them.

In my view, there are several problems associated with Bokovoy's attempt to characterize the Book of Moses as pseudepigrapha, some of which were first pointed out by Kevin Barney, and others that I have detailed in a review that was published shortly after Bokovoy's book appeared. Avram Shannon has likewise shown that the application of the term "midrash" to the Book of Moses, though worthy of discussion, is equally problematic if taken at face value.

But what of Bokovoy's option one?

In my view, the idea that scriptural figures may sometimes be more accurately regarded as the *authorities* rather than the direct *authors* or scribes for biblical books associated with their names is not at odds with Latter-day Saint acceptance of the Bible as scripture "as far as it is translated [and transmitted] correctly" (Articles of Faith 1:8).

In trying to imagine more concretely how authority and authorship may have come together in the writing of prophetic teachings and revelations that may have originated, in part, in oral sources, we have modern day analogues. Though these are not perfect analogues, they may still serve as helpful illustrations.

Consider, for example, the fact that Joseph Smith's Nauvoo sermons were neither written out in advance nor taken down by listeners verbatim as they were delivered. Rather, they were copied as notes and reconstructions of his prose (sometimes retrospectively) by a small number of individuals, generally including an official scribe. These notes were in turn shared and copied by others. Later, as part of serialized versions of history that appeared in church publications, many (but not all) of the notes from such sermons were expanded, amalgamated, and harmonized; prose was smoothed out; and punctuation and grammar were standardized. Sometimes the wording of related journal entries from scribes and others was changed to the first

person and incorporated into the *Documentary History of the Church* in order to fill in gaps, an accepted practice at the time.

Over the years, various compilations drew directly from these published accounts while, more recently, transcriptions of contemporary notes (including sources that were unavailable to historians who produced the standard amalgamated versions) were also collected and published. Translations of these accounts into different languages sometimes created new difficulties.

The important point in all this is that while published accounts of the Prophet's Nauvoo sermons have been widely used to convey his teachings to church members on his authority, it may be that few or none of these accounts were written or reviewed by him personally.

Moreover, less than 200 years after these sermons were delivered, multiple variants in their content and wording—none of which completely reflect the actual words spoken—are in common circulation. In some cases, imperfect transcriptions of Joseph Smith's words led to misunderstandings of doctrine by early Church leaders and, in consequence, have been explicitly corrected by later Church leaders. Despite their admitted imperfections, most believing members of the Church regard the teachings of Joseph Smith as of priceless worth and, although not on a par with scripture, are usually seen as authoritative in their pronouncements, prophecies, and teachings.

In conclusion, I have no problem with according the imperfect ancient record of the teachings and stories of prominent Old Testament figures such as Abraham and Moses an appropriately qualified respect just as I accord an appropriately qualified respect to the no doubt significantly less-imperfect recent record of Joseph Smith, especially in cases where the accounts of these ancient characters have been elaborated, clarified, or otherwise backed by modern scripture.

And, though I hold this position as a matter of faith, I do not think that it has been ruled out by scholarship.

With even more certainty, I accept that major scriptural individuals hailing from the dim and obscure past are part of material history because Joseph Smith and his associates testified that many of them returned to give instruction, bear testimony, and impart the essential keys and authority that enabled a veritable restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ to the earth.

What do you think of Thomas Wayment's recent hypothesis about the origin of the Joseph Smith Translation?

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw: In Thomas Wayment's chapter in a book entitled *Foundational Texts of Mormonism* that discusses how "Joseph Smith initiated a new and ambitious … project" to translate the Bible, he motivates his analysis by asserting that "the reasons he began the undertaking have never been fully understood." He concludes that the impetus for the JST came, in essence, as an unplanned afterthought to his having received a revelation of the visions of Moses (Moses 1), which, it is argued, came in response to questions about Moses and the Creation that had arisen over the course of the preceding year.

I have great respect for Wayment's well-attested scholarship, and I would not want to minimize the great service he has rendered to Latter-day Saints in his edition of the JST and his New Testament writings, among others. But in this chapter, he is not at his best. While the underlying arguments are not completely without merit, they are generally overstated, and some of the counterevidence is ignored.

My primary concerns can be expressed under three main points, which are explained in more detail within a recent *Interpreter* blog article.

1. **Omitting discussion of the prehistory of the JST.** Had Wayment included a more complete account of the prehistory of the JST, readers would more easily realize that

the impetus for the Bible revision was not a sudden, unexpected development. Although it is true that there is currently no direct evidence that Joseph Smith was expressly commanded by the Lord to begin a translation of the Bible, as Wayment rightly observes, multiple lines of evidence, including specific references in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants, suggest that the restoration of lost truths from the Bible was clearly anticipated. Moreover, it has been argued that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery's may have had the JST in mind when they purchased a Bible in October 1829 that was later used in the work of translation. Regrettably, none of these elements of the well-known prehistory of the JST is mentioned in the chapter.

2. **Arguing that the earliest extant manuscript version of the JST (OT1) is a copy rather than an original dictation.** To further flesh out his thesis, Wayment asserts that the earliest extant manuscript of Moses 1 was a copy rather than an original dictation. I find the evidence for this hypothesis weak, thus agreeing with the conclusion of the Joseph Smith Papers editors who found it "inconclusive" and Colby Townsend's more strongly stated view that it is "difficult to accept the idea that Moses 1 was originally dictated on a separate manuscript page from OT1." While early in the chapter, Wayment initially concurs with the views of others that the evidence for the hypothesis that OT1 is a copy is "not overwhelmingly conclusive"(—i.e., "inconclusive"), by the end of the chapter Wayment asserts more boldly that the "original document … was eventually copied into OT1" without qualifying the claim or otherwise acknowledging any uncertainty about it.
3. **Arguing that the JST was originally envisioned as a scripture harmonization project.** Wayment's argument that the OT1 Moses 1 manuscript is a copy is part of a larger argument that "the Bible revision was, in its infancy, a kind of editing project to bring existing canonical texts into harmony" with the revelations Joseph Smith had received prior to June 1830. The problem with this reasoning is not only that the connections between the revelations cited and the early chapters of the Book of Moses are somewhat loose, but also that the opposite of what is argued is true: the translation of the early chapters of Genesis that eventually became the Book of Moses introduce doctrines that were radical innovations and, in some cases, clear departures from many things the Prophet appears to have understood prior to that time. As Avram Shannon, drawing on the earlier work of Robert J. Matthews, puts it "many distinctive Latter-day Saint beliefs are actually first found in the JST."

Surprisingly, the emphasis of the discussion in the chapter is almost wholly on human initiative and the conscious or unconscious appropriation of biblical material as the basis for the JST revisions. Inexplicably, the author does not mention evidence adduced by other scholars that many of the surprising and extensive doctrines, teachings, and narratives contained in the Book of Moses that have little or no biblical basis are arguably related to ancient texts from *outside* the Bible.

Though, of course, the chapter is a scholarly publication, not a devotional treatise, credible studies providing evidence for both literary sophistication and ancient threads in the Book of Moses can and should be considered alongside competent scholarship documenting nineteenth-century influences.

Although the arguments in this chapter specifically relating to the origins of the JST are nto as strong as I would have expected from Wayment, I am in perfect agreement with his conclusion that despite the general tendency of most scholars to see the JST as little more than "a result of Smith's own New Testament worldview," there is room to see the translation through different eyes as "a process of inspiration."

I also applaud the accuracy of Wayment's beautifully and succinctly-worded summary of the Prophet's viewpoint on modern-day revelation as a whole:

Joseph Smith seems to have viewed all revelation, prophetic writing, and scripture—both ancient and modern—as consistent manifestations of the eternal and divine gospel of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, the Prophet's inspired teachings, translations, and revelations affirm that Adam and Eve, Abraham, and Moses were actually Christians—the most important and central lost truth that has been restored and prominently featured in every work of Latter-day Saint scripture.

To accept Joseph Smith as the Prophet of the Restoration is to possess an assurance that this restored truth has a basis in material history, rather than being merely the byproduct of a lively imagination fueled by wishful thinking nurtured and encouraged by

a nineteenth-century Christian home and commnity.

What do you think about Samuel M. Brown's characterization of the Joseph Smith Translation in general and the Book of Moses in particular?

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw: What I enjoy most about Samuel Brown's recent book on translation is the overall richness of his conceptions. In particular, his aversion to reductionism paired with his embrace of systems thinking permits him to see the JST as the result of a metaphysical rather than mechanical process. His preference for the "rich wildness of reality" coupled with his skepticism of the ultimate nihilism of some postmodernists allows him to accept the reality of Sariah and Lehi along with that of Sarah and Abraham.

He makes a valiant effort to recover what Joseph Smith meant by the term "translation" when he applied to texts such as the JST, and makes the case that scholars should not feel obliged to render the word in scare quotes.

There is much else to be admired generally in Brown's work that cannot be described here, but I hope to do more justice to it in an upcoming review of selected chapters from his book on translation.

With specific reference to the Book of Moses, Brown, unlike the recent chapter by Wayment, explicitly acknowledges the prehistory of the JST as it is found in the Book of Mormon. He makes it clear that the coming forth of a new Bible translation in the last days was foreseen by Nephi with as much certainty as was the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

He also recognizes the significant foreshadowings of Book of Moses teachings about the Fall of Adam and Eve in the Book of Mormon.

(Noel Reynolds and Jeff Lindsay delve further into this relationship in their upcoming conference presentation, arguing that relevant passages in the earlier-translated Book of Mormon depend on brass plates material reflected in the later-translated Book of Moses!)

Brown also discusses the broad reach and important implications of the two-way reverberations between the Book of Moses and the Doctrine and Covenants (building on the pioneering work by Robert J. Matthews others), and correctly argues that Joseph Smith's interest in newly translating the Bible continued to the end of his life.

He realizes that accounts that downplay the role of revelation in the production of the JST are "incomplete."

There is, however, one incomplete aspect of Brown's own work: his seeming failure to fully appreciate the connection between the Book of Moses and the temple.

To Brown's credit, he does mention a few of the temple-related themes that resonate with his work on the JST: for example, the reframing of the Fall "as a story about human deification through the infusion of divine essence and human choice, exercised with the protection of Jesus as Savior" and the Prophet's exegesis of Hebrews 7:1-3 that elaborated on the temple-related offices of "prophets, priests, and kings." Importantly, Brown *does* recognize that the Book of Abraham, translated some years later, "was above all a temple text."

But perhaps in part because the Book of Moses was translated so much earlier in Joseph Smith's ministry, he did not seem to realize that the same could be said of it.

Hints of the relationship between the Book of Moses and the temple can be found in Doctrine and Covenants section 35, which Brown cites in relationship to Sidney Rigdon's call to assist Joseph Smith with the JST. Indeed, the language of verses 18-20 contain significant parallels to temple-related teachings of Enoch in the OT1 manuscript of Moses 6:59 and 61—as well as, surprisingly, to a key motif in the as yet untranslated Moses 7.

Brown neither mentions these allusions to Moses 6-7 in section 35, nor their temple connotations:

- **Mysteries.** The Lord declares in verse 18 that He has given "the keys of the mystery of those things which have been sealed" to Joseph Smith, echoing the Lord's admonition in the OT1 manuscript of Moses 6 that Enoch should teach his children that they must be "born again … into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven."
- **Comforter.** The mention of the role of "the Comforter … that knoweth all things" in section 35 matches the Lord's description of "the Comforter" in Moses 6 as "that which knoweth all things." However, the additional context provided by Moses 6 makes it clear that the "Comforter" referred to is something more than the prefatory witness that is meant to come to those who have been baptized in worthiness and, after confirmation, are ready to "receive the Holy Ghost." Instead, it refers to the *sure* knowledge provided by means of what Joseph Smith called the "*Second* Comforter." Moses 6:66 associates this sure knowledge with the "record of the Father, and the Son" that came to Adam through "a voice out of heaven." Note that in verse 68, having received this heavenly witness, or "more sure word of prophecy," Adam is then divinely declared to be a "son of God."
- **Things from the foundation of the world.** The phrase that refers to "things which were from the foundation of the world," mentioned in section 35, is elsewhere in scripture almost always a clear invocation of temple language. It is not impossible that the mention relates to a somewhat similar phrase used in Moses 6:54.
- **The Lord's own bosom.** Curiously, the statement in section 35 that the scriptures that were to be given by the Lord "even as they are in mine own bosom" in verse 20 recalls the six references to the Lord's bosom that are concentrated in the to-be-translated Moses 7, the only chapter where the divine bosom is mentioned in the Pearl of Great Price. As I have noted elsewhere in a discussion of the temple connotations of the Lord's bosom in Moses 7, the foundation stone of the temple, the place of greatest holiness, is said in rabbinic readings to be "set in the bosom of the earth."

While Brown has certainly read much more widely about studies comparing ancient documents to the Book of Moses than what is actually mentioned in his writings, the book itself provides no explicit evidence of interest in or familiarity with the ancient

texts from outside the Bible. Such texts could have provided clues to help explain the narrative layout of the early chapters of JST Genesis.

For instance, David Calabro has outlined correspondences between the narrative "architecture" of the Book of Moses and the physical architecture of Israelite temples in a brilliant chapter published in the book based on the 2014 *Temple on Mount Zion Conference* proceedings.

As another example that bears on Brown's discussion of Moses 1, note first that he correctly mentions how the "Visions of Moses" recall the "grand, panoramic visions of Moriancumer, Lehi, and Nephi" as well as the vision of Enoch in Moses 7.

Elsewhere, Brown insightfully observes that "The temple was itself scripture and … in the temple worshipers entered scripture directly." But had Brown explicitly acknowledged the literary relationship of Moses 1 to the ancient "heavenly ascent" literature, he could have better explained the purpose and pattern of its striking narrative structure to his readers.

Brown could have even formulated an extension to his fitting description of the function of Latter-day Saint temples that would highlight resemblances to Moses' ascent to the heavenly temple: "The *heavenly* temple was itself the *reality anticipated in* scripture *and earthly temple worship*, and in the *heavenly* temple worshipers entered *the presence of God, the incarnation of scripture,* directly" (cf. James Faulconer's wonderful essay entitled "Scripture as Incarnation.")

Had the fact that Moses 1 fits squarely within the context of the ancient, extracanonical heavenly ascent literature been explicitly acknowledged and probed, Brown's readers would have also come to understand that Moses 1 was a fitting and not altogether unprecedented "missing" prologue to the stories of Creation and the Fall.

Notably, I think that all of the presenters at the upcoming conference would see the Book of Moses, to a greater or lesser extent, as a temple text. In contrast to the early chapters of Genesis that merely relate the *events* of the Creation and the Fall, the Book

of Moses, like the Book of Mormon, clearly describes the *purpose* of the Creation and the Fall — and its *reversal* in the Atonement of Jesus Christ as depicted in Latter-day temples.

(In Terryl Givens' presentation at the upcoming conference, he will address how the Joseph Smith restored early Christian doctrines related to key aspects of the plan of salvation that were eventually lost due to Augustine's reinterpretations.)

We can all hope that Samuel Brown will apply his considerable talents in some future publication to address the link between the Book of Moses and the temple that was largely (though not entirely) missed in his rich and expansive book on Joseph Smith's translations.

How can the Book of Moses can be considered a temple text?

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw: Because the Book of Moses is the most detailed account of the first chapters of human history found in Latter-day Saint scripture, it is already obvious to endowed members of the Church that it is a temple text *par excellence*, containing a pattern that interleaves sacred history with covenant-making themes.

What may be new to them, however, is that the temple themes in the Book of Moses may extend beyond the first part of the story that contains the downward path of the Fall of Adam and Eve. It seems that there is, in addition, a part two to the temple story related in the Book of Moses, its upward path, a path that culminates in the translation of Enoch and his city.

More specifically, as I suggested in a 2014 *BYU Studies Quarterly* article, the stories preserved in Moses chapters 2-8 seem to illustrate both the consequences of faithfulness and those of unfaithfulness to each temple covenant one by one. These

covenant-related stories appear to unfold chapter by chapter in the specific sequence that would be expected by endowed Latter-day Saints.

Mark J. Johnson has similarly argued that temple covenant-making themes in former times influenced both the structure and the content of the material included in the Book of Moses. He observed that the author frequently "stops the historic portions of the story and weaves into the narrative framework ritual acts such as sacrifice, … ordinances such as baptism, washings, and the gift of the Holy Ghost; and oaths and covenants, such as obedience to marital obligations and oaths of property consecration."

For example, Johnson suggests that while the account of Enoch and his city of Zion was being read, members of the attending congregation might have been "put under oath to be a chosen, covenant people and to keep all things in common, with all their property belonging to the Lord."

(Note that in David Calabro's presentation at the upcoming conference, he will discuss the possibility of a ritual context for some late antique and medieval Adam and Eve accounts. And the significant presentation of John W. Welch and Jackson Abhau will discuss themes in the Book of Moses that reflect the interests of the Levites who served anciently in Israelite temples.)

The pattern of structuring scripture to reflect specific temple covenants is not unprecedented. For example, another scriptural account that seems to conform with a pattern of covenant-making can be found in John W. Welch's analysis of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and the Book of Mormon Sermon at the Temple. Welch finds that the commandments described in these sermons "are not only the same as the main commandments always issued at the temple, but they appear largely in the same order."

In a related vein, eminent biblical scholar David Noel Freedman highlighted an opposite pattern of covenant-*breaking* in the "Primary History" of the Old Testament. He concluded that the sequence of books in the main thread of biblical history was

deliberately structured by a master editor to reveal a sequence where nine of the ten commandments were broken in order one by one. Freedman argues that the successive breaking of each of the commandments finally triggered a sort of three-strikes-and-you're-out consequence, manifested in "the downfall of the nation of Israel, the destruction of the Temple, and the banishment of survivors from the Promised Land."

Remarkably, the Book of Moses contains stories that illustrate both how each of the temple covenants were respected and also how they were ignored. Importantly, the history of Adam through Enoch and Noah in the Book of Moses also describes the ultimate consequences of covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking. In the final two chapters of the Book of Moses, Enoch and his people receive the blessing of an endless life as they are taken up to the bosom of God (Moses 7:69), while the wicked experience untimely death in the destruction of the great Flood (Moses 8:30).

How does the opening chapter of the Book of Moses, Moses 1, fit into this picture of the Book of Moses as a temple text?

To answer this question, it is necessary to understand the difference between two different but related experiences, namely *ritual* ascent and *heavenly* ascent. Briefly, whereas temple rituals dramatically depict a *figurative* journey into the presence of God, the ancient heavenly ascent literature contains stories of exceptional individuals who experienced *actual* encounters with Deity within the *heavenly* temple— what Hugh Nibley called the "completion or fulfillment" of the "types and images" found in earthly ordinances.

I agree with Don Bradley that the First Vision might be best understood with accounts of other prophetic instances of heavenly ascent as background.

To illustrate the difference between heavenly and ritual ascent in ancient Jewish tradition, scholar Amy Elizabeth Paulsen-Reed contrasts two pseudepigraphal texts, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and the twelfth Sabbath song at Qumran. In the heavenly

ascent depicted in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* "a man is [actually] taken up to heaven," while in the ritual ascent described in the Sabbath song the religious community *figuratively* joins the angels in praising God through ritual "while staying firmly on earth."

At the conference, David Larsen, Stephen Whitlock, and I will argue that Moses 1 is an account of *heavenly* ascent, comparable to the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, while, on the other hand, Moses 2 through 8 seems to contain stories related to the covenants necessary for *ritual* ascent, the kind of figurative ascent that takes place in earthly temples. In essence, Moses 1 seems to provide a prelude to chapters 2 through 8, as first suggested by scholars such as Douglas Clark and David Bokovoy. Notably, the Book of Moses sequence of heavenly ascent followed by a vision of the Creation and the Fall is a pattern that can be found elsewhere in ancient Jewish tradition.

In our presentation, we will describe why we consider the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is a remarkable exemplar of this pattern. Not only does its account of Abraham's heavenly ascent culminate in a vision of the Creation and the Fall, but, in addition, it seems to us that the details within the account of Abraham's heavenly ascent can be matched to the sequence of major events in the heavenly ascent of Moses 1 from start to finish.

In this regard, notwithstanding the fact that King James *language* is used throughout Moses 1 (as it is used in all of Joseph Smith's translations—cf. recent work by Royal Skousen on this topic), the narrative elements and sequence of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* matches Moses 1 much more closely than other claimed sources, such as the temptation scene of Matthew 4. Matthew 4, of course, shares some features of a common type scene in the confrontation with Satan in Moses 1, but does not come close to the specificity or resemblances and breadth across the narrative as a whole as does the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.

Is it plausible that Joseph Smith knew so much about temple ordinances so early in his ministry?

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw: Yes, I think so. In an article entitled "What did Joseph Smith know about modern temple ordinances by 1836?" and a companion article on Freemasonry and the origin of temple ordinances, I discuss what the Prophet would have learned about the priesthood and temple matters through revelations, translations, and personal experiences with heavenly beings.

For example, the Book of Mormon would have provided an early formative influence on Joseph Smith. Its temple teachings have not yet been fully appreciated. Besides the temple-related information available in the published version of the Book of Mormon (as David Bokovoy, among others, has previously pointed out), extant evidence relating to the lost pages from Mormon's abridgement, carefully gathered and analyzed by Don Bradley, suggests many important clues about Nephite temples. Significantly, he concludes that "rather than being a Levitical priesthood 'after the order of Aaron,' Nephite priesthood [and temple activities appear to have been] modeled primarily on Israelite royal priesthood 'after the order of Melchizedek.'"

Joseph Smith's revelations contain many unmistakable references to significant components of priesthood and temple doctrines, authority, and ordinances that were not included as part of the preparatory Kirtland Temple endowment. Many of these references date to the early 1830s, a decade or more before the Prophet began bestowing temple blessings on the Saints in Nauvoo. And given Joseph Smith's reluctance to share the details of sacred events and doctrines publicly, it is certainly possible he received specific knowledge about some temple matters even earlier than can now be documented. These matters include:

1. *The narrative backbone, clothing, and covenants* of the modern Latter-day Saint temple endowment—as detailed in the 1830 Book of Moses and remembrances of some of Joseph Smith's associates;
2. *The sequence of additional temple blessings, including sealing, that relate to the oath and covenant of the priesthood*—as illustrated in the stories about Abraham and about Melchizedek in later JST Genesis chapters, and in 1832 Doctrine and Covenants section 84; and
3. *Priesthood keys symbolized in words, signs, and tokens*—going back at least as far as

May 15, 1829, when John the Baptist restored the "keys of the ministering of angels" (Joseph Smith—History, 1:69; Doctrine and Covenants 13:1) that were used in "detecting the devil when he appeared as an angel of light" (Doctrine and Covenants 128:20).

We believe that a significant portion of Joseph Smith's early tutoring on the temple occurred in 1830 and 1831 when he translated Genesis 1-24. It is significant that the Book of Moses, the first portion of his Genesis translation, was revealed more than a decade before he administered the full temple endowment to others in Nauvoo. Taken as a whole, the Book of Moses is one of several indicators that the Prophet Joseph Smith's extensive knowledge of temple matters was the result of early revelations, not late inventions.

The idea that the 1830 Book of Moses contains detailed information about temple matters will probably sound as ludicrous to some people as the idea that Adam and Eve were Christians. Nevertheless, I believe that the mistaken assumption that Joseph Smith didn't know much about the Nauvoo temple ordinances, covenants, blessings until he got to Nauvoo will become less attractive to fair-minded scholars to the degree they become more aware of ancient, temple-related threads in the Book of Moses.

How does studying the literary structures in the Book of Moses strengthen the case for the book's legitimacy?

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw: Most readers will be familiar with research by John W. Welch, Noel B. Reynolds, Nicholas J. Frederick, Donald A. Parry, Grant Hardy, and many others who have highlighted ancient literary features of the Book of Mormon. Recently, scholars have begun to explore similar features in the Book of Moses. For example, Mark J. Johnson published a good introduction to the topic in an article published in *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scripture* earlier this year.

Also of note are Matthew L. Bowen's repeated demonstrations of elegant wordplay in the names and key phrases of ancient and modern scripture. His mode of analysis vividly demonstrates that recognizing wordplay not only can help us hear what is being said within a given passage but also can allow us to sense significant, sympathetic reverberations among texts widely separated in their settings.

(*In Bowen's conference presentation, he will apply this approach to the theme of the divine "word," a motif that pervades every chapter of the Book of Moses.*)

The importance of understanding these forms, figures of speech, and instances of wordplay does not merely reside in the idea that ancient Hebraic literary features provide evidence for the antiquity of the Book of Moses, but also in the fact that they help us read the scriptural texts as their authors intended. Recognizing the forms that ancient authors used to persuade their readers with stylistic beauty and power brings latter-day readers closer to seeing and hearing as their counterparts did long ago.

What else can we look forward to after the September conference?

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw: Here are some additional resources that will appear in the coming months:

- **Additional publications** on relevant topics, including two articles in the *Interpreter* journal that discuss issues in textual criticism raised by Colby Townsend, including the question of whether it is God or Enoch who weeps in Moses 7:28; and whether the names "Mahujah" and "Mahijah" in Moses 6-7 share a common, ancient origin with similar names in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls;
- **A second Book of Moses conference** scheduled for April 23-24, 2021, with Richard L. Bushman as the keynote speaker.
- **Proceedings of these two conferences**, along with supplemental materials, will be

made available online and will also be published in book form.

In anticipation of the expected 2022 *Come, Follow Me* Old Testament curriculum, several Book of Moses resources are being prepared by Pearl of Great Price Central, in association with The Interpreter Foundation. These resources will be described in a launch event by Ryan Dahle at the conference:

- **An introduction and FAQ** for the Book of Moses;
- **Book of Moses *Insights*.** A weekly series of Book of Moses *Insights* was begun earlier this year and will continue through most of 2021. Twenty-five articles describing ancient affinities in content, wordplay, and literary style to the Moses 6-7 Enoch account have already been posted. Among other things, these articles demonstrate that the most dense collection of pertinent resemblances to the Book of Moses in the ancient literature are not found in *1 Enoch,* which was published in Joseph Smith's lifetime, but rather in a Dead Sea Scrolls work named the *Book of Giants* and other texts that were not discovered until after the Prophet's death. *(Jared Ludlow will be presenting at the conference on the reception history and figure of Enoch in the pseudepigrapha, highlighting similarities and differences with the Moses 6-7.)*
- **Book of Moses Bibliography**. Alphabetically and topically organized references to research on ancient threads in the Book of Moses will provide a valuable resource to scholars working in allied fields relating to the JST and the Book of Moses. We hope this will increase awareness of the many scattered publications of relevance published over the last few decades;
- **Pearl of Great Price Study Guide.** A new *Pearl of Great Price Study Guide* is slated for publication at the end of 2021, co-authored by Stephen Smoot and myself.

Any closing observations?

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw: In openly declaring my love affair with this marvelous and wonderful work of modern scripture, it would be easy to speak rhapsodically, averring that the Book of Moses is both truth beautifully rendered and beauty truthfully

depicted. In doing so, I would be echoing the sentiment of Irving Lavin, who once declared that: "Truth and Beauty are equal, inseparable and ultimately indistinguishable paths toward one end, Knowledge."

However, so long as we have mortal eyes incapable of seeing "things as they really are" (Jacob 4:13), we cannot treat truth and beauty as coequals. When a contest between the two arises, truth must always be allowed to trump beauty. This is because one of the most painful yet necessary disciplines sometimes imposed on us by life is the obligation to embrace truths that, at first blush, appear ugly and to reject seemingly beautiful fictions. It will not suffice to believe, like Vitruvius, that "All this is true, because it rhymes."

The importance of this principle was recently brought home to me when my wife and I were watching an old film adaptation of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* where Christian and Hopeful, their feet weary with the rough, rocky path, "wished for a better way." Their wishful thinking led them into error as they followed "Vain-confidence" on the beautiful, grassy path that led through "By-path Meadow." The narrator's succinct comment, which I was surprised not to have remembered from the book, was that the two pilgrims, distracted by the difficulty of the way, had sadly "mistaken beauty for truth."

After the film ended, I went straight to the bookshelf to find the place where the apt phrase should have appeared in Bunyan's original book. To my surprise, the phrase was nowhere to be found—so I realized that it must have been invented by the screenplay authors. Still captivated by the concept, I pursued my search for the phrase on Google. There I found a brilliant article by the Nobel Prize winning economist Paul Krugman. He wrote it shortly after the Great Recession of 2008, a recession that many of the best economists, including Krugman himself, had failed to foresee. As a summary of his crucial insight, he wrote:

As I see it, the economics profession went astray because economists, as a group, *mistook beauty, clad in impressive-looking mathematics, for truth*. … The central cause of the profession's failure was the desire for an all-encompassing, intellectually elegant

approach that also gave economists a chance to show off their mathematical prowess.

Imagine my delight when I also found a link that led me to a mention of Krugman's article in a book by biblical scholar Joshua Berman. The general implication he draws from Krugman is that in order to "avoid the pitfall of mistaking beauty for truth" we "will have to learn to live with messiness," in particular when we are assessing the age, authenticity, meaning, significance, and provenance of texts from the ancient world, especially when these texts breathe the air of the sacred. When we succeed in creating a solution that is simple and beautiful (a result that cannot help but massage the ego of any breathing scholar), we sometimes discover that the result is too simple to reflect the complexity of truth (which may require a higher order of elegance than our initial, "cleaner" solutions afford). Obviously, in the end, our answers ought to be as simple as possible—but, of course, no simpler.

There's enough in that realization to keep me feeling small and inadequate indefinitely. But as I stumble along the trail I'm grateful to have the Book of Moses as my own personal "Hopeful"—a friendly and indispensable guide and spur on my pilgrimage toward the place where earthly scripture finally unfolds, at last transfigured into the full glory of eternal reality.

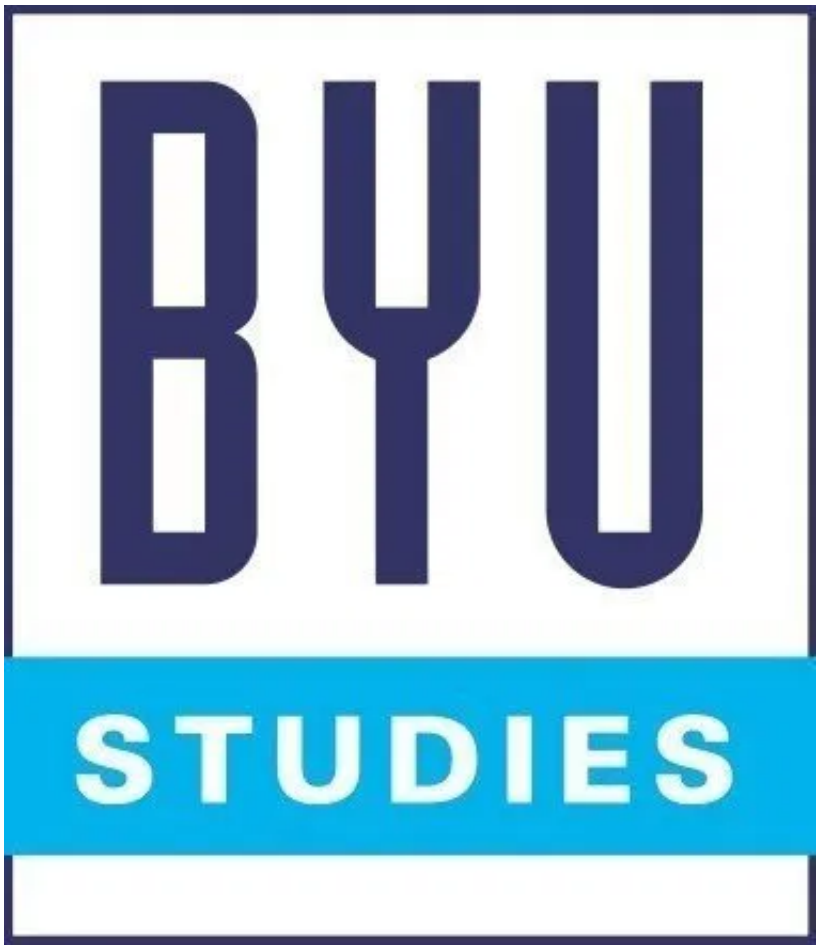
Recommended resources

Looking for more information about Joseph Smith and ancient texts? Try these interviews.

- Ancients Texts and the Enoch Seminar
- Thomas Wayment and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible
- 10 Questions with Daniel C. Peterson

- 10 Questions with John Gee
- 10 Questions with Dennis B. Horne

This interview is made possible thanks to the generous sponsorship of BYU Studies.



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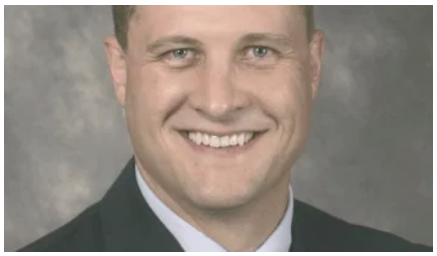

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2 Replies to “10 Questions with Jeffrey M. Bradshaw”

Robert F. Smith

SEPTEMBER 14, 2020 AT 4:47 PM

A very nice summary, Jeff.
I’d just like to add that, even if we entirely ignore unique Latter-day Saint Scripture, the Bible itself tells us many of these esoteric truths.

For example, as then Anglican Bishop Tom Wright commented (without considering LDS views), the Creation and Garden story in Genesis is “a temple story.” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxQpFosrTUk .

Likewise, one can find various elements of the LDS endowment within straight biblical texts — https://www.quora.com/Does-the-Bible-mention-anything-about-eternal-families-like-the-LDS-church-teaches/answer/Bob-Smith-3106 .

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw

SEPTEMBER 16, 2020 AT 7:03 AM

Hi, Robert! Thank you for your comment and for pointing me to the link to the Tom Wright video and your own post.

Kind regards,
Jerr