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**A Lengthening Shadow
Is Quality of Thought Deteriorating
in LDS Scholarly Discourse Regarding
Prophets and Revelation?
Part Three**

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PART THREE

Duane Boyce

Abstract: Many mistakes that occur in scholarly endeavors are understandable. The truth is often difficult to discover, and this makes errors inevitable and expected. And, of course, some mistakes are so insignificant that to complain of them would be mere pedantry. But this is not true of all errors. Some are both obvious and of such significance to their topics that they are egregious. With respect to the gospel, there is reason to be concerned that this is occurring to some degree on the topic of prophets and the Lord's revelations to them. Erroneous claims and arguments are not difficult to find, including some published under the auspices of reputable and mainstream entities. Is it possible that such errors are becoming common, and commonly accepted, in Latter-day Saint scholarly discourse? Part One considered multiple examples, primarily from Terryl Givens and Patrick Mason, that begin to suggest a positive answer to this question, and Part Two did the same with regard to examples from Grant Hardy. This Part considers several additional instances that can be treated more briefly and then provides a general conclusion to the two-part question that has guided this exploration.

As discussed in Parts One and Two, the purpose of this paper is to investigate whether there is a general (and growing) deterioration of thought on the topic of prophets and revelation in LDS scholarly discourse. One wonders, in other words, whether errors on this topic

are becoming common, and commonly accepted, in the rhetoric of LDS scholars.

In pursuit of this two-part question, we have discussed the following topics in Parts One and Two.

Part One

Terryl Givens and Patrick Mason: “In All Patience and Faith”

Patrick Mason: The Lord’s Guidance to the Church

Terryl Givens and Patrick Mason: The Priesthood-Temple
Restriction

Conclusion to Part One

Part Two (all sections are based on Grant Hardy’s work)

Grant Hardy: Introduction

Nephi as Exclusionary and Condemning in Attitude

Nephi’s Failure to Eat of the Fruit of the Tree

Nephi’s Misleading Narrative Regarding Laman and Lemuel

“Another Side” to the Story Regarding Laman and Lemuel

Nephi’s Omission of Lehi as a Witness of the Lord

“Irony” in Nephi’s Committing the First Act of Killing in the Book
of Mormon

One Methodological Note

Conclusion to Part Two

These are the matters we will discuss in this Part:

Part Three

Terryl Givens: Abraham, Moses, and Jonah

Brief Additional Illustrations

General Conclusion: A Lengthening Shadow

As in the earlier Parts, I provide periodic summaries and conclusions along the way, knowing some readers will want only a headline view of the content. For the most impatient, the general conclusion at the end of this Part broadly summarizes the results of the complete paper.

Terryl Givens: Abraham, Moses, and Jonah

To begin, consider the effort by Terryl Givens to demonstrate that we should not expect moral superiority (what he calls “a level of holiness”)

from men called as prophets. They are not, he informs us, unfailing “specimens of virtue and perfection.”¹ Givens supports this point by attributing failings to men who were prophets or who later came to be prophets. Here are three of his examples:

Abraham

Givens tells us more than once that Abraham lied regarding his relationship to his wife Sarah.² The Old Testament records two separate accounts of this sort (Genesis 12:10–20; 20:1–18), and the second explicitly states what is likely also true of the first: in order to prevent corrupt men from killing him in order to obtain Sarah for themselves, Abraham capitalized on the fact that Sarah was his half-sister in addition to being his wife. To avert his death Abraham reported to his inquirers only that Sarah was his sister and omitted the fact of their marital relationship.³

This, of course, is deceitful, and Givens finds it morally objectionable, including it as an example of prophets’ wrongdoing.

Overlooking the Book of Abraham and Other Relevant Scripture

While it is natural to want to understand prophets, it seems inadequate to assert Abraham’s wrongfulness without considering the account of the same circumstance in the Book of Abraham (Abraham 2:21-25). There it is not Abraham but *the Lord* who originates the lie of self-preservation. Givens does not mention this account, much less address the complication it raises for his claim — namely: if it is morally wrong for Abraham to practice deception, then what are we to make of an account in which the Lord tells Abraham to lie?

Related to this question is the account of the king of Egypt’s commanding midwives to kill all the male Hebrew children they delivered. The midwives refused to obey the king’s order, and they concealed their refusal by straightforwardly lying to him — all of which is presented in the text as completely approved by the Lord. Indeed, God is depicted as explicitly blessing the midwives for their conduct (Exodus 1:7–22).

Givens does not consider these matters or others like them, but in expressing a judgment about lying one would like to see him do so.

Problematic Moral Thinking

It is also interesting that Givens appears to base his condemnation of Abraham on the simple assumption that deception, in itself, is morally wrong. He treats the matter as if it were axiomatic, but this approach

seems too simple. Germans (and others) who hid Jews from the Nazis were effectively lying every day of their lives, and yet it is difficult to see how their doing so was in any way morally objectionable. And suppose, to take a famous (and related) case, that (1) a would-be murderer appears at your door and asks the whereabouts of the person he wants to kill, and (2) that the person he seeks is actually hiding in your home. It is far from obvious that it would be morally wrong to lie to the would-be murderer in this case in order to prevent the murder he clearly intends.⁴ Or, to consider a more mundane example, note that when people leave their homes even for a short period, the last thing they typically want to do is advertise that they are not at home. People thus commonly arrange matters to make it appear that they *are* at home even though they are not. That is certainly a lie ... but it is hard to imagine that Givens or anyone else would think such a lie is *wrong*.

This is not the place to examine the conditions under which lying is and is not justified. That is a subtle topic, and I address some of the considerations involved in it elsewhere.⁵ It is sufficient to note only that Givens is quick to condemn Abraham without even considering the question — despite its obviousness and despite its importance to his claim. And, as mentioned previously, he also condemns Abraham without consideration of the scriptural report in which *the Lord* is the one who directs Abraham to lie.

Moses

Another example occurs in the way Givens thinks about Moses. He says in one place that Moses was “guilty of manslaughter and covered up his crime”⁶ and in another that “Moses probably committed murder.”⁷ Such remarks refer to the account recorded in Exodus of Moses’s slaying an Egyptian who was “smiting” one of the Hebrew slaves (Exodus 2:11–15).

Manslaughter/Murder

Again, however, the approach Givens takes in these places seems flawed. While it is understandable to be concerned about any act of killing, it is not obvious that lethally defending someone automatically falls under the category of “manslaughter,” much less under the more serious category of “murder.” In asserting such claims Givens seems to be imagining a *tout court* prohibition against all killing, just as he seems to imagine a similar prohibition against all lying in the case of Abraham. But it does not seem sufficient to assume this. The view requires demonstration. We can imagine circumstances, for example, in which

a woman might — if she had no alternative — lethally defend herself against rape, and yet it is hard to see how anyone could reasonably apply words like “manslaughter,” “murder,” or “crime” to her action. We can also imagine circumstances in which parents might lethally defend their family members from assault (an example Eugene England used more than once⁸), but again it is not obvious why conduct of this sort would be called “murder.” That is why we must see an *argument* for why all killing — including killing in defense of others — is morally prohibited.

Cover-up

The same difficulty appears in the disapproval Givens exhibits toward Moses’s “cover-up” of his act of killing. It is easy to imagine a political culture so corrupt and dangerous that it is not obvious one owes its civic processes any degree of fidelity, much less complete fealty (particularly when the processes unjustly and significantly risk one’s life). And it is easy to imagine this was the situation with Moses. Indeed, who would know better than Moses, raised in Pharaoh’s daughter’s court, what his chances with the law would be? (This is a fact he cannot have been unaware of prior to the death of the Egyptian — which means he knew what the cost of his action was going to be.)⁹ Egypt’s government was a dictatorship materially supported by — and yet fearful of — a slave class, and its political and criminal-law realities appear to have been anything but just. The record indicates (as Moses would have known) that Moses had no chance for the kind of fair hearing we presuppose in Western jurisprudence of the twenty-first century, for example. Pharaoh appears in the text to *presuppose* that Moses had done wrong and that he was guilty of murder. Moreover, it is equally apparent that Moses’s life was considered utterly inconsequential and easily ended by royal edict (Exodus 2:15).

All this is why the thinking Givens brings to Moses appears to be too simple. It is far from obvious that lethally defending someone is never justified, and it is equally far from obvious that “covering up” one’s behavior in such a case is never justified.

Jonah

A slightly different kind of error is evident in the instance of Jonah. In speaking of prophets’ weaknesses, Givens mentions Jonah’s attempt to flee the Lord’s command that he visit Nineveh and call its populace to repentance.¹⁰ Patrick Mason draws attention to Jonah in the same condemning spirit.¹¹

But it might be wise to restrain our haste to criticize Jonah. Nineveh was a city and sometime capital of ancient Assyria — a country with a ruthless history stretching over centuries. One scholar says the evidence reveals Assyria to be “as gory and bloodcurdling a history as we know.”¹² Because it was an expansive and aggressive culture, Assyria’s brutality was visited upon others, and its reputation for cruelty therefore was wide. Its kings routinely speak of (and items of art routinely display) their human atrocities: gouging out eyes, cutting off noses and ears, severing arms and hands, impaling adversaries on stakes, hanging severed heads from the walls of conquered cities, driving stakes through multiple heads (as on a totem pole) and displaying them publicly — and so forth.¹³

This is how Assyria treated its adversaries — and this is the culture Jonah was commanded to visit and openly condemn.

Such facts are worth keeping in mind when relying on Jonah to illustrate prophetic imperfections. That point is technically accurate, of course. The problem is, it is hard to imagine anyone in the twenty-first century United States possessing the moral authority to make it.

Summary

There is nothing faulty per se in acknowledging the human character and mortal imperfection of prophets, of course. When considered in the full context of a prophet’s devotion, sacrifice, spiritual power, and eternal contribution to the human family, recognition of human qualities can have an endearing — and even inspiring — effect. What *is* faulty in acknowledging prophets’ weaknesses is doing so without any treatment of these essential matters of context as well as being cavalier in referencing such “imperfections” in the first place. That’s how these particular examples strike me — they don’t actually help us draw any conclusions about prophetic “imperfections.”

Brief Additional Illustrations

To round out our sample regarding prophets and revelation in LDS scholarly discourse, it is worth addressing a handful of final examples that lend themselves to brief treatment.

Nephi as Liar and Murderer

One author, building on prior work by others, applies a “narrative” approach to Nephi and as a consequence comes to see Nephi’s slaying

of Laban as an act of murder and his account of the episode as an act of mendacity.¹⁴

Central to this interpretation is a reliance on René Girard's work on cultural scapegoating. As applied to the Book of Mormon generally, the core idea of this view is that cultures perpetuate and escalate violence until they either face and heal that violence in themselves or (subconsciously) find a scapegoat on which to release it. Scapegoating in this way is only a temporary solution, however, since it merely conceals the violence rather than healing it. To scapegoat is to flee the truth rather than to confront and correct it — which means the violence is certain to erupt again.¹⁵

The standard form such scapegoating takes is in an act of violence that justifies itself in the name of redemption or necessity — an act of killing, for example, that is committed in the name of saving an entire nation. In this case the violence is actually sacrificial in nature because it trades the demise of the few in order to preserve the many.

This is meaningful because this particular author supposes that Nephi's slaying of Laban is a clear example of just such scapegoating. And as an act of such scapegoating violence, the slaying of Laban was obviously wrong — which means that Nephi's explanation of the event in terms of the Lord's direction has to be false: a cover-up.

A Central Problem with the Scapegoating Explanation

There is a logical problem with this way of thinking about the matter, however. The argument's reasoning jumps from the observation that the slaying of Laban was an act of violence that justified itself, to the conclusion that the slaying of Laban was therefore an act of scapegoating (an act that seeks to hide rather than to heal the violence in oneself) because it implicitly assumes all acts of violence that justify themselves (at least in terms of "necessity") are necessarily acts of scapegoating.

But it would seem that we cannot simply assume this. The claim calls for demonstration. After all, even if we stipulate that scapegoating occurs through an act of violence that justifies itself, it does not follow that every act of violence that justifies itself is therefore an act of scapegoating. That is a logical truism. (All oranges are round, but not all round things are oranges.) Proponents of the scapegoating view must therefore grant at least the possibility of an act of violence that is justified on *legitimate* grounds of necessity and that is not, therefore, an act of mere scapegoating. To refuse to grant this would be, in effect, to assert the truth of the claim by simple fiat: all acts of violence that justify

themselves by appeal to necessity are scapegoating acts *by definition* — a mental maneuver that, in application to individual cases like Nephi’s, does nothing more than assume what it is appearing to prove.¹⁶

The only acceptable way to apply Girard’s theory to Nephi is to demonstrate separately, on independent grounds, that Nephi was wrong to kill Laban — i.e., that his justification for doing so was illegitimate. To treat Girard’s theory as if *it* proves that Nephi’s justification was illegitimate (because, for example, it appealed to “necessity”) and as if *it* gives grounds to think that Nephi lied about the episode is to rely on reasoning that is logically vacuous.¹⁷

The Lord’s Conduct and Scapegoating Violence

We can appreciate this problem further from another angle. Note, for example, the Lord’s own statement to the Nephites, reported by Mormon, that “ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed” (Alma 43:47). Here we have both violence and its justification: the violence of defense is justified explicitly in the name of necessity — the Nephites’ need to defend their families. This would seem to conform to the general parameters of Girard’s theory, and yet it would seem obvious that it is not an example of scapegoating. After all, if the Book of Mormon is to be trusted, Jesus Christ himself is the one who is both framing the matter and advocating the violence (“ye shall”) — and actually helping the Nephites execute it, for that matter.¹⁸ To see this as an example of scapegoating, therefore — which, again, is an act performed in order to conceal the violence in oneself rather than to confront and heal it — is to see the Lord himself as both needing to confront and heal the violence in himself and failing to do so. Although ludicrous, this is the conclusion that follows if we both trust the Book of Mormon and bluntly apply Girard’s theory to it. If Nephi is guilty of scapegoating violence, then, so it would seem, the Lord, too, is guilty of scapegoating violence.

This application of Girard’s theory, then, would seem to be mistaken and, not surprisingly, to lead to an absurd conclusion as well. In the end, the scapegoating view supplies no reason to accept the idea that Nephi was wrong to slay Laban and that doing so constituted murder, nor that he practiced deceit in his reporting of the episode. Appealing to Girard in this instance, in this way, is a mistake. And it is not a small one, since charging Nephi with murder and mendacity are not, by anyone’s standards, small accusations.¹⁹

Abraham's Moral Failure, God's Injustice, and God's Change-of-Mind

Another LDS author warmly reports Judy Klitsner's approach to the story of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22:1–18).²⁰ Klitsner, writing from the standpoint of Jewish literary analysis, describes God's command to Abraham in this episode as unethical and unjust. Indeed, she reads the book of Job as literature fashioned by later authors specifically to subvert this Abraham story. The account of Job does this mainly by raising questions the Abraham story does not raise — for example: What does a righteous servant do if children actually die (as in the case of Job) rather than being spared at the last minute (as in the case of Abraham)? The book also subverts the Abraham episode by having Job protest God's injustice in a way Abraham does not. Abraham's voiceless acceptance of God's unethical command is thus corrected by the story's sequel in Job, where, according to Klitsner, Job actually challenges God's injustice and is approved by God for doing so.

All this is accepted without objection by this LDS author, who concludes that God's initial approval of Abraham and later of Job demonstrates a dramatic alteration in God's thinking over time. It thus shows, he says, that the Divine Mind is open and willing to change.

Although all this is interesting from the standpoint of Jewish literary tradition (again, the point of view from which Klitsner writes), one would expect an LDS author to address and account for at least three serious obstacles to this thinking in Latter-day Saint scripture. The first of these is the appearance of multiple prophetic expressions that emphasize the justice of God (e.g., Mosiah 29:12; D&C 109:77), including passages declaring that if justice were denied, God would cease to be God (Alma 42:13, 25).²¹ The second is the appearance of multiple prophetic expressions that emphatically describe God as unchanging in character (e.g., Moroni 8:18; D&C 20:17; 88:33), including a passage claiming that if God changed, he would — in this case, too — cease to be God (Mormon 9:19).²² And the third, though less significant, is the Lord's explicit statement of approval in this dispensation of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac (D&C 132:50–51), while there is no similar latter-day expression of approval regarding (as Klitsner describes it) Job's challenging conduct toward the Lord — a matter at least worth noting along the way in any effort to compare the Lord's attitude toward these two scriptural figures.²³

It would seem that textual elements of this sort — particularly the first two, regarding God's justice and God's unchanging nature — need

to be addressed and accounted for in reaching conclusions that assert the *opposite* of what these passages indicate. Unfortunately, the author does not attend to such scriptural matters, much less demonstrate how they are to be reconciled with (1) what he tacitly accepts from Klitsner about God's injustice towards Abraham and (2) what he explicitly states as his own conclusions about God's change of mind.

“In All Patience and Faith”

Consider also the first topic addressed in this paper, “In All Patience and Faith,” which appeared in Part One. Givens and Mason, as we saw, address this topic, and both do so specifically in the context of what they consider to be problems. Givens speaks of the moral deficiencies he sees in various prophetic leaders, for instance — including Abraham, Moses, and Jonah, whom we considered above — and also of “practices that challenge and try one's faith; teachings whose status as eternal truth is either disconcerting, questionable, or now denied.”²⁴ He refers to polygamy, the Adam-God theory, and the priesthood-temple restriction. In this context he speaks of “teachings that seem to have the stamp of divine authority that are later declared to be in error.”²⁵ He later adds: “Eternal principles are just that — eternal and immutable. However, hindsight shows some policies and practices to have been less than immutable.”²⁶

From this overall context Givens frames the matter of heeding prophets “in all patience and faith” in terms of God's delegation to his mortal servants. He notes that mortals regularly delegate authority to one another and, building on the work of Austin Farrer (a twentieth-century Anglican scholar), emphasizes that this is what the Lord does as well. Authorized by God, such a servant possesses a certain “power of attorney” — which means that “the person's acts, *within circumscribed limits*, carry the weight and efficacy of God's own acts.”²⁷

As Givens points out, however, to delegate such authority and responsibility to mortal servants is to guarantee mortal mistakes. He refers to human weaknesses regarding Joseph Smith, for instance, and also speaks of mistaken actions by leaders (all of which, again, is the general context of his discussion). Givens quotes Farrer that “God ‘does not promise [Peter, or Joseph] infallible correctness in reproducing on earth the eternal decrees of heaven.’”²⁸ Givens adds: “Farrer warned against the mistake of assuming ‘a perfect conformity of Peter's [the prophet's] decision with a foreordaining will of God, conceived as a

creative blueprint, or Platonic idea, which Peter [or the prophet] faithfully copies.”²⁹

As modern-day instances of such mismatch between human judgment and “the eternal decrees of heaven” (or the divine “blueprint”), Givens shares the example of an imperfect decision that might be made by a bishop and the mistake that might be made by a General Authority in calling a stake president.³⁰ He also quotes the statement by B. H. Roberts that men of God are “not inspired at all times and in all things.”³¹ Such examples support the view that, as Givens quotes Farrer to say, God does not promise “infallible correctness” on the part of his authorized servants; all he promises is “*that the decisions he [Peter, or Joseph] makes below will be sanctioned from above.*”³² In other words, God authorizes what his servants do, even though they may often be wrong, because he has officially delegated his authority to them. The Lord is in this position because if he authorized only actions that were perfect, his delegation to others wouldn’t be genuine and doing so would require perfect servants.³³

Such propositions lead Givens to say that “surely no human can act with the wisdom, the perfect judgment, the infallibility of God. Precisely so. And if delegation is a real principle — if God really does endow mortals with the authority to act in *His place and with His authority*, even while He knows *they will not act with infallible judgment* — then it becomes clearer why God is asking us to receive the words of the prophet ‘as if from mine own mouth, *in all patience and faith.*”³⁴

Employing the framework suggested by the well-known Farrer, Givens emphasizes both the authority and the weaknesses of God’s servants, the combination of which explains the Lord’s call for “all patience and faith” in sustaining and following them. It follows from this that delegated authority is paramount. As Givens remarks, “the mantle represents priesthood keys, not a level of holiness or infallibility.”³⁵

Considerations in Thinking about Givens’ Approach

Although this account has a definite surface appeal, it is problematic for a number of reasons. All of these were discussed in the section on “The Lord’s Guidance to the Church” in Part One — and, therefore, followed the initial discussion in Part One of the “in all patience and faith” scriptural passage. Thus, while these considerations couldn’t assist our initial treatment of the matter, we are in a position for them to assist us here. Here are the most significant of these considerations.

First, Givens’ narrative does not account for the distinction between instructions and explanations and the reality that the Lord gives far

more of the former than the latter (indeed, as indicated in Part One, Elder Oaks estimates the ratio to be more than a hundred to one). Thus, while it is true, as Givens says, that the priesthood-temple restriction remains incompletely explained, it is also true that this is the case with most things related to the gospel. The Savior's atonement lies at the core of the gospel plan, for example, and yet no one claims to understand all of its dimensions. Such lack of understanding hardly prevents us from speaking about it, relying wholeheartedly upon it, and expressing unending gratitude for it, however. Just so with an endless number of additional gospel matters. Other than our understanding of God's eternal and just perspective in general, we don't understand why parents of young children die, nor do we understand, really, why God needed to permit the death by fire of the women and children in Alma 14 — despite the explanation offered in the passage. Nor do we understand, really, why God — who is no respecter of persons — establishes a specific sequence (two times) in which Israel and gentiles are offered the gospel. Such examples only scratch the surface of all that we fail to understand. To find something that is explained incompletely is not an anomaly in the fabric of God's actions and revelations to mortals; it is the norm. In itself, therefore, there is nothing unique about absence of understanding on one topic or another, and thus there is nothing inherently problematic when it occurs.

Second, and related to this, Givens' approach does not consider the distinction we saw in Part One between actions and explanations. Since the Lord gives far more instructions than explanations, leaders and others who *try* to give explanations are typically “on their own” in doing so. It always pays, therefore, to emphasize that a mistaken explanation for a given practice does not entail the mistakenness of the practice itself. Without clear acknowledgment of this, it is easy to be beguiled into assuming otherwise.

Third, Givens' approach does not consider the distinction between statements made by individuals and statements made by authorized councils — a matter also discussed in Part One. Givens speaks of “teachings that seem to have the stamp of divine authority and are later declared to be in error.”³⁶ He mentions the Adam-God theory, but he could have referred just as easily to various explanations offered by different leaders for the priesthood-temple restriction. In both cases, the events simply illustrate what the Lord emphasized in the Doctrine and Covenants: the highest authority in the Church is not an individual, but a council (D&C 107:27–29).³⁷ In the words of one apostle: “The doctrine

is taught by all 15 members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve. ... True principles are taught frequently and by many.”³⁸ Brigham Young, as an individual, taught things about Adam that were not authoritative and that were officially disavowed by a later presiding council. The same is true of individuals’ teachings regarding the priesthood-temple restriction: they are not authoritative and they never have been. Thus, although it is understandable why Givens is worried by teachings that appeared to have the stamp of divine authority and were later overturned, the reality is that they never *had* the stamp of divine authority.

Fourth, Givens begins his discussion of problematic issues with the mention of polygamy, the Adam-God theory, and the priesthood-temple ban, but then, when he talks specifically about imperfections and how mistakes can occur, his examples are: (1) a general nod to how a bishop might make mistakes in leading his ward and (2) a second-hand anecdote about how a General Authority can make a mistake in calling a stake president. Such common matters seem to Givens relevant in thinking about the much larger issues he has in mind, but for two reasons they are only remotely analogous. For one thing, the instances Givens mentions are of much smaller scope than the types of large social and ecclesiastical matters that are addressed by the presiding councils of the Church. For another, decisions at the ward level, as well as in finding a stake president, don’t involve joint and sustained discussions by fifteen men who are called as prophets, seers, and revelators and who possess all the keys given by God to men on earth. These differences are significant and give us little if any reason to think we can generalize from the local-level cases Givens mentions to the type of large general cases he is trying to explain. As discussed in Part One, there would seem to be a natural correlation (a “sliding scale,” so to speak) between the importance of a given matter and the extent to which the Lord governs decisions about it. Givens’ account does not incorporate this likelihood — nor explain why it would be mistaken to do so — and thus generalizes from one kind of circumstance to a circumstance of a significantly different kind. This does not seem justified.

Fifth, Givens’ account does not consider the distinction between doctrines and practices. He says: “Eternal principles are just that — eternal and immutable. However, hindsight shows some policies and practices to have been less than immutable.”³⁹ But here Givens conflates the concepts in his statement. He acknowledges the immutability of eternal principles, and then speaks of practices that are not immutable,

and acts as if this difference constitutes a contradiction. But it can't constitute a contradiction since, in common usage, the difference in immutability is what constitutes the difference between principles and practices in the first place. Moreover, *much* of what the Lord does falls in the category of non-immutable practice. He has shifted from directing his work on earth through patriarchs to directing it through apostolic quorums and he has changed from a priesthood system which included only the tribe of Levi to one that includes all males. Such examples, among many others, would appear to instantiate the Lord's statement that "I, the Lord, command and revoke, as it seemeth me good" (D&C 56:4). A statement of this sort would seem to guarantee the non-immutability of many policies and practices and thus to create the *expectation* that changes will occur in the Lord's operation of his kingdom. It follows from this that change is not equivalent to correction or that it is an acknowledgment that past practice was mistaken. (It wasn't wrong to operate through patriarchs just because a change was eventually made toward apostolic quorums.) Nothing about change *per se* is unique or problematic.

These are only a few observations. Nevertheless, they permit us to identify a general difficulty in Givens' approach. He begins with the idea that there are problems that require explaining — specifically, the apparent flip-flop on the Adam-God theory and the (at a minimum) incomplete explanation of the priesthood-temple restriction — but what we have seen is that these are not actually problems. Both are fully explainable by principles that apply to gospel topics generally. Givens' effort to fashion an approach to help members think about such Church "problems" is laudable, but it would appear unnecessary, since the problems he identifies don't actually exist.

Revelation

There is another matter to raise regarding Givens' approach, however. It is the general issue of revelation. Givens' discussion emphasizes the imprecision and fallibility involved in divine communication to mortals and relies on Farrer to help express this imprecision. Farrer's remarks indicate that he thinks *no* understanding of the divine can be completely accurate — thus the rejection of "perfect conformity" and "infallible correctness" to the divine blueprint regarding the example he addresses. Since Givens quotes and relies on Farrer, this would seem to be Givens' view as well. Moreover, Givens quotes B. H. Roberts' statement that inspiration is not received "at all times and in all things," suggesting,

apparently, that revelation is not only imprecise but also less than frequent.

In emphasizing such a point of view it would seem necessary to consider, and account for, numerous evidences that suggest something different. There is reason to believe that the Father and Son were able to communicate clearly with Joseph Smith in the First Vision, for example, and that Moroni was similarly able to do so during multiple lengthy visits with the Prophet. Numerous other divine visitors seem to have been able to do so as well. We have, in addition, an entire book of scripture comprised of revelations to Joseph Smith, as well as the Book of Mormon — which records more than 250,000 words of revelation to the Prophet. Moreover, we have record of Alma obtaining detailed communication from the Lord regarding enemy troop movements and of Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni all revealing detailed sentiments and words of the Lord in their writings. The list goes on — and it suggests a degree of revelation, and a degree of clarity in revelation, that are different from what Givens and Farrer seem to be proposing.

In this connection, it is interesting to note a remark by a modern member of the Twelve, particularly regarding clarity: “The Lord has a way of pouring pure intelligence into our minds to prompt us, to guide us, to teach us, to warn us. You can know the things you need to know instantly!”⁴⁰ He also said:

Should an angel appear and converse with you, neither you nor he would be confined to corporeal sight or sound in order to communicate. For there is that spiritual process, described by the Prophet Joseph Smith, by which pure intelligence can flow into our minds and we can know what we need to know without either the drudgery of study or the passage of time, for it is revelation.⁴¹

These declarations from a modern apostle do not emphasize the difficulty of communication between divine and mortal beings when it happens. Instead, the statements emphasize the utter clarity of such communication through “pure intelligence.” One is reminded of President George Q. Cannon’s report that the presiding Brethren do not necessarily know the outcomes of all their actions, but that they can nevertheless know “with perfect surety” the steps they are to take.⁴² This sentiment was echoed by President Russell M. Nelson in his own report of divine communication to the presiding Brethren on a matter of importance.⁴³

Such considerations are useful to keep in mind when reading Farrer's comments about revelatory experience. It is true that mortals are incapable of comprehending God's eternal perspective — the fullness of the "Platonic idea" or divine "blueprint" — but it does not follow from this that divine communication on specific matters is guaranteed to be fuzzy or uncertain. Even though he did not possess God's eternal perspective, for example, Russell M. Nelson was still able to receive a vision showing him exactly how to perform a surgical procedure that had not yet been discovered and that saved his patient's life. Dallin H. Oaks was similarly able to receive clear direction from the Lord that he should submit an application for the Utah Supreme Court, Bruce R. McConkie was able to see in vision persons from the spirit world in attendance at a funeral, Hugh B. Brown was able to visit with the deceased Harold B. Lee from the spirit world,⁴⁴ prophets are able to receive detailed direction about whom to call to the Twelve — and on and on and on. The accounts are numerous and far too many to detail. Such accounts, along with numerous important statements regarding daily revelation to the presiding Brethren of the Church (covered in some detail in Part One) also appear to contradict any thought that revelation is more or less infrequent.

It does not follow from any of this that receiving revelation is easy or that everyone is equally capable of it, of course. Nevertheless, a very large literature exists that either purports to be — or to report — the Lord's revelations to prophetic leaders (and of course to members generally), from Joseph Smith to the present. It is a literature that bespeaks a large volume of revelation, and the possibility of clarity in divine communication, that far exceeds what Farrer could be expected to fathom. Although Givens does not appear to address this literature (some of which appears in Part One), it would seem necessary to do so in discussing revelation — and particularly if one wants to emphasize the imprecision and (apparently) the infrequency of God's communication to his servants. It is certainly appropriate to consider the views of a thoughtful and learned Anglican scholar, but it would seem even more instructive to consider and weigh the numerous statements of prophets and apostles themselves regarding the Lord's revelations to them.

Summary

Givens sees problems residing in certain matters of Church doctrine and practice and he attempts to reach a view of revelation, delegation, and human weakness that can help members process these problems.

His thinking leads to a particular interpretation of the Lord's command to receive prophets' word "as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith." The interpretation seems to include these central elements: (1) because of their human weaknesses God's servants can never be perfectly correct — and they can even be importantly *incorrect*; (2) God's servants nevertheless possess God's authorization; and (3) because of this combination, to sustain and follow those servants "in all patience and faith" means to be patient in following them in the face of their weaknesses and mistakes — including very important ones.

Though Givens' attempt to help members is laudable, this approach actually seems misdirected. When we understand various distinctions and principles that apply to gospel topics generally, we see that Givens is motivated to account for problems that don't actually exist: there are really no "problems" to explain (at least not among those he lists). If these problems don't actually exist, however, then there is no need to account for them — and thus no need to emphasize the weaknesses of mortal leaders and the imprecision of revelation to them. We can thus take a more nuanced view of spiritual matters, informed by a wider consideration of evidence regarding the extent and clarity of God's communication to his servants.

Let's put this another way: the place from which Givens begins appears to destine him to what seems an exaggerated view of prophetic weakness and fallibility — including on important issues — and thus to an unwarranted emphasis on divine authorization over divine revelation.

This way of looking at the matter is unnecessary, though. When we understand the distinctions briefly covered above (and more fully in Part One), and when we consider seriously the evidence that the Lord provides significant (though not total) spiritual guidance to his mortal representatives (also covered in Part One), there is little reason to focus on the mortal weaknesses and imperfections of prophetic leaders — although it is important, of course, to acknowledge them — and similarly little reason to be pessimistic about the degree of revelation they receive. The weaknesses are less extensive, and the revelation more extensive, than Givens appears to suppose.

All this is why it seems completely untenable that the Lord is saying in this passage what Givens thinks he is saying. It takes little patience and faith to live with the actual mortal weaknesses of prophets. It takes far more, it seems to me, to construct an ark, face death by lion or fire, leave Jerusalem, move to Missouri, migrate to the Rocky Mountains, and face scorn — and even disgust — for supporting prophets' stands on the

hot-button social issues of one's day. The instruction to follow prophets wholeheartedly through enduring matters like these would, as I said in Part One, be the more natural interpretation of the Lord's command to receive prophets' words as if from his own mouth and to do so "in all patience and faith."

Prejudice and Lack of Diligence in a Record-Keeping Error

Another example — that can be handled more briefly — is found in Joseph Spencer's suggestion about the failure of Nephite record-keepers in one instance. It is the case in which the Nephites failed to record the fulfillment of one of the prophecies uttered by Samuel the Lamanite, namely, that "many saints" would "arise from the dead" and appear to others following the resurrection of the Savior (3 Nephi 23:6–9). Spencer offhandedly reports that the Lord "reprimanded" the record-keepers for their oversight in failing to record this fulfillment, and expresses his suspicion that their being "less than fully diligent" was due to prejudice — i.e., to Samuel's status as a Lamanite.⁴⁵

Spencer seems, to me, to exaggerate the Lord's reaction to the error,⁴⁶ and he also speaks of less-than-full diligence without giving appropriate consideration to the character of Nephi — the record-keeper at the time of the prophecy's fulfillment. This was a man, we are told, who was "cleansed every whit from his iniquity" (3 Nephi 8:1), who performed numerous significant miracles, including raising the dead (3 Nephi 7:17, 19–20; 18:1), and who enjoyed the ministering of angels *daily* (3 Nephi 7:18). It seems unlikely that errors made by *this* man can be attributed to lack of diligence.

In addition, Spencer floats the prejudice claim without providing any argument for it, which leaves us wondering what evidence he has for the suggestion. It goes without saying, of course, that Nephi was not morally perfect, despite the report that he was cleansed "every whit" from iniquity: moral imperfection is true of everyone, even the most saintly. But this does not seem sufficient reason to be cavalier in casting aspersions on Nephi for a *specific* weakness. A specific charge would seem to require a specific argument — a discussion of the degrees of evidence both for and against the proposition and a thoughtful judgment about its plausibility, all things considered.

Unfortunately, Spencer does not do this. He suggests Nephi's prejudice without argument and without any consideration of what the record actually tells us about him. The effect is a casual disparagement of Nephi rather than a responsible consideration of him.

Jacob as Un-Christlike and Sherem as Sincere

Another example that can be handled briefly is Adam Miller's analysis of the episode between Jacob and Sherem recorded in Jacob 7.⁴⁷ Against all convention, Miller sees Sherem as "apparently sincere" in his assault on the doctrine of Christ: Sherem seems to Miller to be genuine in his desire simply to defend the law of Moses from the kind of alien influences represented by Jacob's Christian teachings. Conversely, Miller sees Jacob as "unfair" and un-Christlike in his treatment of Sherem: according to Miller, although Jacob speaks of Christian love in the form of Christ and his atonement, he fails to actually "enact" any Christian love toward Sherem. Such conclusions about Jacob and Sherem are surprising, of course, and the evidence Miller offers for them seems persuasive to some. Unfortunately, as I have shown elsewhere, the evidence for Miller's claims is actually inadequate and constitutes an unfair treatment of Jacob. There is actually no basis for revising our understanding of either Jacob or Sherem in the way Miller desires.⁴⁸

Summary

The examples we have just considered, though intriguing on the surface, turn out to seem inadequate. The view that Nephi was murderous and mendacious in his conduct regarding Laban, that God is unjust and that he changes, that Nephi demonstrated lack of dedication as well as prejudice toward Samuel the Lamanite, and so forth — all would seem to be mistaken in fundamental ways. Moreover, all these faulty contentions pertain to the important topic of prophets and revelation *and* all of them appear in reputable venues.

General Conclusion: A Lengthening Shadow

As a conclusion to this long paper, it seems right to speak from a more personal and reflective point of view. It's a peculiar business, after all — to embark on a project of cataloguing and writing about errors. On one hand, it's not really a pleasant way to spend time, and on the other, you never really shake the feeling that you commit errors and oversights of your own (in retrospect I notice things here and there that I wish I had done differently in everything I have written over the years). So what's the point in thinking about mistakes by others?

The only reason in my case is that the topic strikes me as vitally important. And that makes it worth the risk (glass houses and all). I do not see how to disregard or even to minimize a statement like this:

“Whosoever receiveth my word receiveth me, and whosoever receiveth me, receiveth those, the First Presidency, whom I have sent” (D&C 112:20). And when Aaron and Miriam thought to criticize Moses, the Lord responded very simply. He rehearsed his intimate association with that great prophet and then, based on that association, asked: “Wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” (Numbers 12:8).

Prophets and revelation — there is reason to take the matter seriously.

The motivation for this paper, therefore, has been to ask if current scholarly discourse on this topic is slipping. Are too many mistakes occurring and thus affecting the general intellectual landscape on this important subject? The question has had two parts: one, do important errors occur, and two, are such errors becoming common, and commonly accepted, in the rhetoric of LDS scholars?

As I said at the start, in Part One, in pursuing these questions the issue is never about individual scholars themselves. It is only about claims. Claims are inextricably connected to the authors who make them, of course, and that’s why authors’ names, particularly when they are well-known, typically have to be used just in order to ease communication. But that is always entirely incidental. Regardless of who makes it, the only question is whether a given assertion stands up to scrutiny. To critique a claim, therefore, is not remotely to suggest that its author is unfaithful or unworthy, or that anything else in their scholarship (on other topics, for example) is flawed. Those are completely separate questions — and the first two are of course none of my business (I assume that every person whose name appears is devoted to the gospel and to helping the kingdom), while the third is thoroughly outside my scope in this paper. My focus has been very narrow: to examine various assertions on a specific (though important) topic, one at a time, and to identify where and why they seem to be unjustified. To critique a claim, even emphatically, is to do nothing more than critique that claim.

It is worth noting, also, that in a project focused specifically on identifying mistakes it can be hard to manage the tone just right, particularly since there is a certain cumulative effect (not only in reading, but also in writing) that attends examining one claim after another, page after page. To those who find themselves reading this paper and who think I failed in tone, I offer my apologies. No excuses. And, of course, I do not exempt myself from intellectual criticism. I imagine oversights of my own will be evident to others before they are evident to me, and I will wholly accept correction of these wherever they are found.

Now, however, as to the first of my questions — “Do important errors occur?” — my answer is that I believe they do. I won’t bother to review, or even to summarize, all the matters I have considered over the three Parts of this paper. They are there and can be visited any time by anyone who is interested. I do not expect everyone to agree with all of my conclusions, but I think the volume is significant enough that it is hard to simply disregard them.

The second question — “Are errors becoming common, and commonly accepted?” — is more difficult to answer. What constitutes becoming “common, and commonly accepted?” I don’t have concrete answers, but three data points are at least relevant in thinking about the matter.

The first is something I just mentioned: the volume of claims we have had occasion to examine. The second is related to this: the volume of apparent mistakes that seem to me to lie behind these mistaken claims. (A faulty assertion by itself is one thing; errors in analysis that lie behind it are something in addition, and I have tried to identify these in every case I have taken up.) And the third data point is that every claim that I think is faulty — and thus every analytical error that I think lies behind these claims — all appear under the auspices of respectable and trusted publishing entities. They didn’t catch the errors I noticed — which means, of course, that they didn’t think they were errors. If they had they would have corrected them. But notice: if I am right that a given claim is an error, and if a publishing entity fails to catch it because it doesn’t believe that claim is an error, then this, in itself, is evidence that a lengthening shadow has, indeed, started to darken the intellectual landscape (remember: we are assuming that I am right). Error has at least begun to achieve status as non-error.

You might not think this happens where I think it happens. But I’ll bet you believe it happens somewhere. And that means you have your own worries about intellectual landscapes.

The problem is exacerbated by the way source-quoting occurs over the course of time. If a claim, however mistaken, at least appears sound on the surface, it is easy to imagine other authors repeating the claim and citing the original author as the authority for it — and later a third party citing the second, and so on. To the degree this occurs and the pattern replicates itself, eventually the unjustified assertion can become simply a new shared assumption — simply passed down through multiple generations of secondary source-quoting on the assumption that someone, somewhere in the past, must have established it. Thus can

a completely mistaken view on a topic become the received view on that topic.

This is one manner in which errors can infiltrate scholarly thought and proliferate not only widely but across generations. It is something to be resisted, and resisted particularly on topics of genuine importance.

In any case, this constellation of data — the faulty claims I see, the errors in analysis I see that lie behind the faulty claims, and the appearance of all of them in reputable venues — seems noteworthy to me. If I am at least substantially right about all this, it is hard to see how there could not be a general loosening of thought on this topic — a contamination, to some degree, of the very intellectual landscape that LDS scholars accept and share. It seems possible, in other words, that at least some false conclusions are indeed becoming new shared assumptions. The evidence for this is at least suggestive. To me, based on all I have seen, a shadow is apparent. And to me, based on all I have seen, there is reason to believe it is lengthening.

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Endnotes

1. See Terryl Givens, “Letter to a Doubter,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 4 (2013): 135; <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/letter-to-a-doubter/#more-2521>. See also Terryl Givens and Fiona Givens, *Crucible of Doubt: Reflections on the Quest for Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), Kindle location 1205.

2. See, for example, Terryl Givens and Fiona Givens, *Crucible of Doubt: Reflections on the Quest for Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), Kindle location 1150; Terryl Givens, “Letter to a Doubter,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 4 (2013): 131–146, <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/letter-to-a-doubter/#more-2521>; and the transcription of a Q&A with Givens found in “Faithful LDS Scholars Address Faith Crisis,” available at <https://www.dropbox.com/s/b1j6uzrsm5zeptc/Faithful%20LDS%20Scholars%20Address%20Faith%20Crisis.pdf?dl=0>.
3. The account in Genesis 12 occurs before the Lord changed Abram and Sarai’s names to “Abraham” and “Sarah”; the account in Genesis 20 occurs afterward. For simplicity’s sake I use their later names.
4. This famous case is due to Benjamin Constant, and is found in many places. One source is Lenval A. Callender, “In Defence of Kant’s ‘Infamous’ Reply to Constant: ‘On a Supposed Right to Lie from Benevolent Motives,’” 2008; <https://www.scribd.com/document/22273589/In-Defence-of-Kant-s-Reply-to-Constant>. Constant developed this case specifically in order to challenge Kant’s view of lying, and a sizeable literature has grown up around the matter. I give an overview in my *Even unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on War* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015), 27–29, esp. Note 20.
5. I outline a general framework for thinking about right and wrong, including lying (and violence, for that matter), in *Even unto Bloodshed*, particularly Chapter 2.
6. Terryl Givens, “Letter to a Doubter,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 4 (2013): 134–135, <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/letter-to-a-doubter/#more-2521>. See also Terryl Givens and Fiona Givens, *Crucible of Doubt: Reflections on the Quest for Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), Kindle location 1150.
7. See “Faithful LDS Scholars Address Faith Crisis,” available at <https://www.dropbox.com/s/b1j6uzrsm5zeptc/Faithful%20LDS%20Scholars%20Address%20Faith%20Crisis.pdf?dl=0>.
8. See Eugene England, “A Case for Mormon Christian Pacifism,” in Valerie M. Hudson and Kerry M. Kartchner, *Moral Perspectives on U.S. Security Policy: Views from the LDS Community* (Provo,

UT: David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies, Brigham Young University, 1995), 100–101. See also his “Thou Shalt Not Kill: An Ethics of Non-Violence,” in Eugene England, *Making Peace: Personal Essays* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 173.

9. I am indebted to Greg Smith for this observation.
10. See Terryl Givens, “Letter to a Doubter,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 4 (2013): 131–146, <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/letter-to-a-doubter/#more-2521>, and Terryl Givens and Fiona Givens, *Crucible of Doubt: Reflections on the Quest for Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), Kindle location 1150.
11. Patrick Q. Mason, *Planted: Belief and Belonging in an Age of Doubt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), Kindle 2225–2240.
12. Erika Bleibtreu, “Grisly Assyrian Record of Torture and Death,” *Biblical Archaeology Society*, 17/1, 1991; http://faculty.uml.edu/ethan_Spanier/Teaching/documents/CP6.0AssyrianTorture.pdf.
13. Ibid. Bleibtreu, “Grisly Assyrian Record.” There are additional sources on Assyrian ruthlessness, but this article is among the most accessible.
14. See Joshua Madson, “A Non-Violent Reading of the Book of Mormon,” in Patrick Q. Mason, J. David Pulsipher, and Richard L. Bushman, eds., *War and Peace in Our Time: Mormon Perspectives* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012), 13–28. My treatment here is a highly abbreviated form of the comprehensive discussion of the narrative view I have presented elsewhere. See Duane Boyce, *Even unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on War* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015), Chapters 8 and 9. The treatment here is revised from one section of that discussion (pp. 142–47).
15. Since the way LDS authors use Girard’s work is what matters for my purposes, my brief characterization and treatment of Girard focuses on the use that Madson, and Eugene England for that matter, make of him. Madson refers regularly to sources that rely on Girard as well as to Girard directly. England’s reliance on Girard is explicit in his *Making Peace: Personal Essays* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books Library, 1995), 1–22, and 131–55. At its most basic level, Girard’s theory of scapegoating violence is descriptive in character: it is a theory that seeks to explain the founding, preserving, and unifying of cultures. Though descriptive in

character as an explanation of violence and of its dispersion (and of how this relates to important cultural phenomena), Girard's concepts lead him to a Christian pacifism that condemns violence as well. Madson and England seem to employ Girard's explanation of violence in a similar spirit, presupposing that the violence being explained is morally wrong. As an effort to vent violence rather than to heal it, this is an effort to flee the truth rather than to face it — all at the expense of a victim who happens to be convenient for these purposes and thus can be (subconsciously) exploited. Seeing Nephi's conduct as an instantiation of such sacrificial violence thus makes it natural to condemn him and to reject the accuracy of his account. Whether Nephi's conduct actually meets all the criteria identified by Girard — and not just LDS authors' versions of his theory — is another question but one I leave aside. It is LDS authors' use of Girard that matters for my purposes, and both Madson and England treat Girard's theory as if it applies seamlessly to Nephi. My focus in this section is specifically on Madson because England does not draw from Girard the same conclusions about Nephi that Madson draws.

16. This raises the question of whether Girard's approach, as applied, is an actual theory or, instead, simply a system of elastic ideas that subsumes every instance of justified violence under "scapegoating" simply as a matter of definition. If the latter, then the approach is empirically empty. This was essentially Popper's objection to Freudian theory long ago: the theory resisted meaningful testing because it was regularly used to explain anything and everything — which meant that any occurrence *whatever* could be taken as an example (and thus as evidence) of the theory. If an event occurred that contradicted what had been expected in terms of a particular wish fulfillment, for example, it was easy to reply that the occurrence simply fulfilled a *different* wish — and thus that this contradiction itself served as an example of the reality of wish fulfillment. The problem is that reasoning in this way precludes the concept of wish fulfillment from any kind of *test*; the idea cannot really be tested if it is treated to begin with as a truth that explains *whatever* happens. If that is our view (even unwittingly), no outcome can fail to be explained by it, and thus no outcome can conceivably contradict it. It is empirically empty and thus, ultimately, explanatorily empty as well. (To some degree all complex theories possess this feature, but at least in the most

empirical disciplines these theories are robustly tested against their capacity to predict new observations.) A blanket application of Girard's theory runs the same kind of risk. If we simply assume all acts of violence that justify themselves are instances of scapegoating, then we are treating this relationship as an analytic truth — as something true by definition and therefore something to which there cannot be an exception. But in that case we make *it*, too, empirically empty. After all, by that standard I could claim that all round objects are oranges because everything we see that is round is simply what I *mean* by an “orange.” I could say that, but to do so would be to abandon all effort to say anything meaningful. In no sense would it be a *theory*, and no one would take it seriously as a way to conclude the truth about round objects. If we are going to appeal to Girard's work, we want to appeal to it in a way that does not render it empty of meaning. But that's what we do if (even unwittingly) we treat it as if it were analytically true and thus as if it automatically subsumed all cases of violence that justify themselves.

17. It is also relevant that Laman and Lemuel never invoke the death of Laban as a point against Nephi. As we saw in the section “‘Another Side’ to the Story Regarding Laman and Lemuel” in Part Two, subsequent generations of Lamanites call Nephi a robber and a liar, but never a murderer. I am indebted to Greg Smith for this point.
18. On scriptural depictions of the Lord's involvement in war, see my *Even unto Bloodshed*, especially Chapter 7.
19. It is important to point out that the narrative approach — at least of the type I am considering here — in fact does *not* trust the Book of Mormon. Specifically, it is prepared to reject any element of the text that does not support a pacifist view of war. In its most basic form, the reasoning goes something like this: *Pacifism is the overarching message of the Book of Mormon. This ultimate message therefore supersedes and corrects any other message that might appear in the text. Thus, no contrary message is authoritative for us, even if uttered by a prophet or reported about the Lord by a prophet (this is because prophets can be mistaken, both in what they say and in what they report). Thus, the only real test of a given utterance and its application to us — regardless of who makes it — is whether or not it instantiates the overarching message of the entire book — namely, pacifism.* This argument seems to avoid the

appearance of absurdity — as in the Lord’s seeming to commit an act of scapegoating by commanding violence and justifying it — because it denies that the Lord actually commanded the violence. That report in the text is an error. Indeed, none of the teachings, episodes, reports, or utterances that are non-pacifist in character are applicable to us, since all of them are in error — either because they are faulty reports in the first place or because, at a minimum, they contradict the message of the book as a whole and thus are superseded by it. It is time-consuming, but not conceptually difficult, to demonstrate the mistakenness of this argument, starting with the initial premise that pacifism is the overarching message of the Book of Mormon. The author’s arguments for this contention fail, which means they provide no support for mistrusting the Book of Mormon text — including prophets’ reports of the Lord’s communications to them — and specifically, that they provide no support for dismissing non-pacifist elements in particular. And this, of course, includes Mormon’s report that the Lord commanded the Nephites to defend their families “even unto bloodshed.” There is no basis whatever in the narrative argument for doubting the truth of this report, and thus there is no way to avoid the absurdity that results from applying Girard’s theory of scapegoating to it. The point thus remains: if Nephi is guilty of scapegoating violence, then the Lord, too, is guilty of scapegoating violence. Though absurd, this is one logical outcome of the way the scapegoating view is applied to the Book of Mormon. (The pacifist narrative view, along with its debilities, is treated in some detail in my *Even unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on War* [Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015], Chapters 8 and 9.)

20. Judy Klitsner, *Subversive Sequels in the Bible: How Biblical Stories Mine and Undermine Each Other* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2011). Austin’s discussion, “Abraham and Job: Suffering,” is found in Julie M. Smith, *As Iron Sharpens Iron: Listening to the Various Voices of Scripture* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016), 7–14.
21. Although it is a subject for another occasion, such statements seem to be *reductio*-type arguments rather than literal pronouncements. Alma seems to be saying something like: “Obviously, justice cannot be destroyed because, if it were, it would mean that God — who is just — would then not be God.” Or, in looser form: “Thinking that justice can be denied is as absurd as imagining that God can cease to be God.” Alma seems to be emphasizing

the importance of justice by stating the absurdity that would follow if justice were denied. It is also possible to understand Alma's statements as *per impossibile* arguments. Basically, this is a form of reasoning in which we grant the impossible in order to emphasize the relationship between two ideas. Thus, Alma could be saying: "If justice were denied (even though that is impossible), God would then no longer be God. That's how central justice is to God's nature." In this way of understanding Alma, he is granting something impossible (i.e., that justice can be denied) simply for the sake of argument: in order to emphasize the connection between God and justice. He is not saying that justice can actually be denied or that God can actually cease to be God. He assumes the impossible simply to emphasize how central justice *is* to God. (Additional important passages regarding God's justice include: 2 Nephi 2:12; 9:17, 26; Jacob 6:10; Alma 12:32; 41:2–3; 42:13–15, 22–25, 30; 3 Nephi 28:35; Ether 8:23; D&C 10:28; 84:102; and 107:84.)

22. Like Alma, Moroni also seems to be advancing a *reductio-* or *per impossibile*-type argument.
23. In providing solace to the Prophet, the Lord does refer to Job's suffering, of course (D&C 121:10). But he does not express approval for whatever "challenge" Job presented to him in protesting the Lord's "unjust" conduct.
24. Givens and Givens, *Crucible*, Kindle location 1391.
25. Givens and Givens, *Crucible*, Kindle location 1391.
26. Givens and Givens, *Crucible*, Kindle location 1483.
27. Givens and Givens, *Crucible*, Kindle location 1407; italics in original.
28. Givens and Givens, *Crucible*, Kindle location 1426.
29. Givens and Givens, *Crucible*, Kindle location 1444.
30. Givens and Givens, *Crucible*, Kindle location 1410.
31. Givens and Givens, *Crucible*, Kindle location 1447.
32. Givens and Givens, *Crucible*, Kindle location 1426; italics in the original.
33. Givens and Givens, *Crucible*, Kindle location 1415.

34. Givens and Givens, *Crucible*, Kindle location 1407; italics in the original.
35. See Givens, “Letter to a Doubter.”
36. Givens and Givens, *Crucible*, Kindle location 1391.
37. On this topic generally, see Boyd K. Packer, “I Say Unto You, Be One,” *BYU Devotional and Fireside Speeches, 1990-1991* (Provo, Utah: University Publications, 1991), 83–84.
38. Neil L. Andersen, “Trial of Your Faith,” General Conference, October 2012; <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2012/10/trial-of-your-faith?lang=eng&r=1>.
39. Givens and Givens, *Crucible*, Kindle location 1492.
40. Boyd K. Packer, “Prayers and Answers,” General Conference, October 2010; <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1979/10/prayers-and-answers?lang=eng>.
41. Boyd K. Packer, “The Candle of the Lord,” *Ensign*, January 1983, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1983/01/the-candle-of-the-lord?lang=eng>.
42. George Q. Cannon, in Jerreld L. Newquist, ed., *Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Zion’s Book Store, 1957), 346.
43. Russell M. Nelson, “Becoming True Millennials,” January 10, 2016, Young Adult Broadcast; <https://www.lds.org/broadcasts/article/worldwide-devotionals/2016/01/becoming-true-millennials?lang=eng>.
44. These accounts all appear in Part One.
45. Joseph M. Spencer, “The Time of Sin,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 9 (2014), 88; <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/the-time-of-sin/#more-4805>.
46. The Lord said to the Disciples simply that “other scriptures I would that ye should write, that ye have not” (3 Nephi 23:6). Then, after drawing attention to Samuel’s prophecy of the resurrection and its fulfillment, he asked: “How be it that ye have not written this thing?” (3 Nephi 23:11), whereupon Nephi corrected the oversight. None of this sounds like what we would normally consider a “reprimand.” That term implies a degree of condemnation not actually present in the account.

47. Adam S. Miller, *Future Mormon: Essays in Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016), 25–33.
48. See my “Reclaiming Jacob,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 22 (2016): 107–129, <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/reclaiming-jacob/>.
49. This does not include a separate counting of every quote or scripture that an author overlooks. “Overlooking” is counted as a single error when an author fails to consider a significant number of relevant statements (examples of which we saw in Part One).
50. Patrick Mason “The Courage of Our Convictions: Embracing Mormonism in a Secular Age,” FairMormon Conference, August 5, 2016; <http://www.fairmormon.org/fair-conferences/2016-fairmormon-conference/courage-convictions>.

