

Lost “Wagonloads of Plates”: The Disappearance and Deliteralization of Sealed Records

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Introduction

When Joseph Smith’s unearthing of the “gold plates” with the mysteriously bound portion first stirred intense controversy in the regions of New York, notions of “sealed books” had already been causing upheavals in other parts of the globe. At the time tremors were still being felt in England from efforts to uncover the controversial “sealed prophecies” of the mystic and prophetess Joanna Southcott, Russell Huntley was establishing a sizeable trust fund for the publication of the forthcoming sealed portion of the Book of Mormon. Huntley’s confidence that the Reorganized LDS Church would soon have the remainder of the record in its possession seemed to have waned by the 1880s, at which point he requested the money be returned.¹ Yet the desire for hidden re-

*Since 1997, the Mormon Scholars Foundation has sponsored a series of Summer Seminars, granting fellowships to young scholars to conduct original research under the direction of senior scholars like Richard Bushman, Terryl Givens, and Matthew Grow, on the campus of Brigham Young University. Rachael Givens’s paper was developed and presented at the 2011 Seminar, and Saskia Tielens’s presentation was part of the 2012 Seminar.

cords has not disappeared. A small group of Southcott followers survives today, with a once-active advertising campaign calling for the “sealed prophecies” to be restored, and splinter groups of the LDS Church have generated their own versions of the “sealed portion” of the Book of Mormon plates.²

For the LDS Church, the controversy surrounding Joseph Smith’s claim to have received and translated a record of ancient American inhabitants has overshadowed the parallel promise of more to come—the so called “sealed portion” of the Book of Mormon which would one day be made available to the world. The majority of the plates’ eyewitnesses mentioned the striking feature of a “part . . . which was sealed,”³ which reportedly ranged in volume between one-third and two-thirds of the entire plates.⁴ Smith, on the other hand, did not seem to attach much significance to them, noting only that he had been “very impressively” prohibited by Moroni from tampering with it.⁵ The ways in which the sealed portion (have) been understood, and more significantly, (have) been used, reveal changing currents and dynamic tensions in Mormon thought, particularly in relation to conceptions of revelation, millennial expectations, restoration, and prophethood. Such ideas were being continually negotiated amidst the shifting cultural and political climates, as well as the competing pressures of a faith tradition committed to radical literalism and institutional demands, to notions of personal revelation and revelatory authority, and to a paradigm of continuing, adaptive revelation as well as divinely orchestrated narrative.

For early church members, the sealed portion’s most salient function was as an instance of material contact with the divine, enabling an ongoing revelatory “flood of knowledge” that “would fill the earth” in preparation for the millennium.⁶ Angelic visitations, streams of revelations, preparations for gathering Israel, and building a utopian Zion corresponded to a brand of faith in this period that was at once disarmingly literal and robustly idealistic. However, as the years passed and certain promises went unfulfilled, including the delivery of the sealed portion, enthusiastic anticipation dwindled to vague, provisional expectation, and then to reproving self-admonishment. Over time, as a fundamentalist strain emphasizing obedience and worthiness began to in-

fuse Mormon culture in the early twentieth century, the sealed portion ironically transformed from literal artifact to an abstract corrective tool; its continuing to be held back became a barometer of unworthiness rather than a source of hope for revelatory abundance. The irony of de-literalization serving the purposes of fundamentalist trends (typically characterized by a deeply literalist approach) is one manifestation of how the Church's identity was reshaped in the early decades through different arrangements and emphases of underlying doctrines and narrative structures.

Textual References to Sealed Records

Because early Mormons understood the Book of Mormon to be a tangible collection of plates physically unearthed by Joseph Smith, the sealed portion was understood in a similarly literal manner. References scattered throughout the Book of Mormon text describing lost scriptures and sealed records provided provocative clues for the possible contents of the sealed portion. For Smith's contemporaries, the sealed record's role as a doctrinal blank check, open to speculation, was constrained by its purported identity as a collection of tangible plates that were part of a real historical story. The Book of Mormon text itself specifies a number of other purposes the sealed records served, beyond that of being a material source of revelation.

Firstly, the sealed records were believed to preserve the account of "all things from the foundation of the world unto the end thereof," and thus the prolonging the bestowal of the records kept the canon open (see 2 Nephi 27:7, 10 and Ether 4:14). The well-known "A Bible! A Bible!" passage in 2 Nephi 29 of the Book of Mormon tells of God's rebuke to those who try to close the canon at one "bible" and "murmur" at "receiv[ing] more of [God's] word" (2 Nephi 29:7). "A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible" (2 Nephi 29:3), such people exclaim, failing to recognize that "there are more nations than one," and that God has commanded "all men, both in the east and in the west, in the north and in the south, and in the islands of the sea . . . [to] write the words which [he] speak[s] unto them" (2 Nephi 29:11). In essence, the canon will never close, and

the lacuna of scripture is but an assurance that God's work is ongoing.

Secondly, the sealed portion serves as a form of spiritual exercise and probation. Mormon's commentary in 3 Nephi, for example, explains that he has written only a "lesser portion" of the things Christ taught the Nephites in his post-resurrection ministry; before the "greater part" will be made manifest, God will "try the faith of [His] people" and the mettle of their obedience (3 Nephi 26:3–12). The sealed vision of the brother of Jared, among other sealed teachings, also specifies similar preconditions of faith, repentance and sanctification, for Gentile and Nephite alike (Ether 4:1, 6–7, 11; 2 Nephi 27:8).

Thirdly, the text also endowed the possessors of the sealed portion with a degree of spiritual authority. The most well-known Book of Mormon passage concerning sealed records—an expansion of Isaiah 29 found in 2 Nephi 27—prophesies that "God shall bring forth unto you the words of a book . . . of them which have slumbered" which will contain a sealed book with a "revelation from God, from the beginning of the world to the ending thereof" that only the chosen "unlearned" man can read. The incapacity of the learned man to read the sealed portion highlights a foreordination and spiritual power afforded those called to handle the sealed records. Transcribers of sealed records had a particular stewardship, as indicated when Nephi is explicitly directed not to write down the revelations of John the Apostle, because John was exclusively ordained to do so. Nephi was also informed of "others who have been" likewise ordained, to whom God hath "shown all things, and they have written them; and they are sealed up to come forth in their purity . . . in the own due time of the Lord, unto the house of Israel" (1 Nephi 14:26).

Finally, within the text, the opening of the sealed portion signals key eschatological events. In his account of the Jaredites, Moroni explains that when the house of Israel turns to God, the great revelations of the Apostle John "shall be unfolded in the eyes of all the people," at which the people "shall know that the time is at hand that they shall be made manifest in very deed" (Ether 4:16). In other words, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon will signal the Restoration and gathering of Israel, while the coming forth of the sealed portion (of John's revelations, in

this case) signals the apocalypse (2 Nephi 29:1–2). Nephi’s explanation of Isaiah’s prophecy adds a sense of proximity to these millennial events, in declaring that the sealed words will be “read upon the house tops” as part of the “marvelous work” God intends to do among the people in but “a very little while” (2 Nephi 27: 11, 26, 28–29).

“Flood of Knowledge”: Literal Anticipation in a Millennial Era

Given such an array of textual clues, early Mormons confidently theorized concerning the contents, location, and timetable for the return of the sealed portion. Despite their fidelity to the sacred texts, writers during this period clearly emphasized the proximity, literalness, and relevance of the sealed records. But one exasperated New York newspaper columnist, reminded of the alarming fervor surrounding the Southcott episode, exclaimed: “If an imposture like the one we have so briefly noticed, could spring up in the great metropolis of England, and spread over a considerable portion of that kingdom, it is not surprising that one equally absurd, should have its origin in this neighborhood . . .”⁷ Many Mormons, however, saw not absurdity but exhilarating discovery, and viewed the sealed portion with the same exuberant literalism manifest in other pre-millennial preparations and Zion-building endeavors.

Newel Knight, Orson Hyde, Daniel Rupp, the Whitmer brothers and their mother, along with Orson Pratt, Lucy Smith, William Smith, and Joseph Smith, Sr., among others, gave accounts of the gold plates that included descriptions of a “large portion of the leaves [that] were so securely bound together that it was impossible to separate them.”⁸ Oliver Cowdery believed that Joseph had identified the sealed portion as the full revelation of the Apostle John, as he recorded in the *Messenger and Advocate* in 1835: “A part of the book was sealed . . . [which] part, said [Joseph], contains the same revelation which was given to John upon the isle of Patmos.”⁹ Two decades later, however, Orson Pratt, claimed that “the plates which were sealed contained an account of those great things shown unto the brother of Jared.”¹⁰ and until a little past the turn of the century, the sealed portion was identi-

fied inconsistently as either the visions of John or the brother of Jared or both.¹¹

Perhaps no image better captures the vivid reality with which the early Saints viewed the sealed records than Oliver Cowdery's recounting of the "cave of treasures." According to Brigham Young's account,

They [Cowdery and Smith] walked into a cave, in which there was a large and spacious room. [Cowdery] says he did not think, at the time, whether they had the light of the sun or artificial light; but that it was just as light as day. They laid the plates on a table; it was a large table that stood in the room. Under this table there was a pile of plates as much as two feet high, and there were altogether in this room more plates than probably many wagon loads; they were piled up in the corners and along the walls.¹²

Brigham Young urged the Saints to understand these things "so that they will not be forgotten and lost," while Heber Kimball also stressed the significance of the records that had been revealed and were yet to come. When a certain Brother Mills opined that the handcart treks of the pioneers were the "greatest events that ever transpired in this Church," Kimball corrected him. Though this "method for gathering Israel" was a useful test, "its importance is small" when compared to angelic visitations, the reception of the sacred records, and "the vision that Joseph and others had, when they went into a cave in the hill Cumorah, and saw more records than ten men could carry."¹³ Perhaps this vision convinced Orson Pratt, who had originally thought the plates were "no doubt kept in charge of the heavenly messenger,"¹⁴ that they were instead, as David Whitmer also confirmed in an 1878 interview, "hidden in the hill Cumorah."¹⁵

In early discussions, the issue of when the plates would be returned began to acquire more significance than where they were hidden or what they contained. Perhaps this is a result of an orientation of the Saints toward a divine timetable, in an epic narrative of millennial preparation for which they themselves were responsible. After all, commentators in these early years addressed the query with confidence: W.W. Phelps claimed in 1832 in the *Evening and Morning Star* that one might "expect . . . as soon as wisdom directs, many sacred records, which have slept for ages" to come from its pages.¹⁶ Even until 1877, Orson Pratt was assuring

his fellow Saints that “these plates of gold will come forth, as well as many other records kept by the first nation . . . And not only these, but the Lord intends, in *this dispensation in which you and I live*, to overwhelm the whole earth with a flood of knowledge in regard to himself.”¹⁷

Just a decade later, after published interviews with David Whitmer that mentioned the forthcoming sealed records, a critical newspaper sardonically responded with the following clip:

“OTHER REVELATIONS”: (From God, man, or the devil) are in store for humanity, already so sadly afflicted, that is, that additional Books of Mormon are liable to come out of the ground “in mine own due time.” Or, as D. W. has it, “more records are yet to come forth from the book that is sealed,” and we all know that by the gift and power of God Joseph only got his stone eye on a part of the contents of the plates, while the rest was kept. Remembering the amazing and interminable mischief already wrought through that old hat we all cry with one accord: From all further calamities of that sort, good Lord deliver us.¹⁸

As animatedly as some Saints—and as unenthusiastically as some critics—awaited the forthcoming sealed records, there were voices of restraint and patience as well. The Book of Mormon text itself had couched the delivery of the records in conditional terms of obedience and readiness, and was echoed by a more temperate Oliver Cowdery in 1835: “when the people of the Lord are prepared, and found worthy, then it will be unfolded unto them.”¹⁹ Even Orson Pratt acknowledged, in more cautious moments, that “we are told that all those things are preserved to come forth in the due time of the Lord,” and stressed elsewhere that only upon the sanctification and obedience of the Saints would the precious knowledge from the sealed records be given at last.²⁰

Tones of literal and proximate promise underscore early conceptions of revelation and seership, and millennial expectations. The sealed record played an important function in each of these doctrinal ideas for the early Saints: they kept the canon open and encouraged Saints to anticipate future revelations, heightened the importance of prophethood and seership, and served as an anticipated source of instruction and light critical to preparing the Saints for the impending millennium.

Revelation

Though Joseph Smith eventually received revelations without any physical medium, material records still held a particularly strong claim on the Saints' sense of scriptural historicity and religious legitimacy. Indeed, Orson Pratt used the literal earthiness of the plates to persuade others of the Book of Mormon's authenticity in some of his tracts:

Now, if Mr. Smith had professed that he had got his book as Swedenborg obtained his or as the Shakers obtained theirs; that is, if he had professed to have obtained this book to usher in this last dispensation in any other way but 'out of the ground,' we should have had reason to suppose him a deceiver, like Swedenborg and thousands of others.²¹

Early missionary pitches focused predominantly on the testimonies of the witnesses who handled or saw the plates—not on the content of the plates themselves.²² The eruption of the divine into the temporal—in Pratt's words, from out of the earth—served as a crucial bridge to the divine presence, a presence that was at home in history, not removed from it. The promise of the sealed portion, therefore, was a reminder of the physical revelations unearthed, and a sign of those to come forth. The sealed portion was both a link to the material reality of the gold plates (now no longer in the Saints' possession), and a portal to the "wagonloads" of records that awaited them, a promise of the continuation of the divine contact that Joseph Smith had initiated. Just as the Book of Mormon demonstrated that "divinity had not ceased direct intercourse with humanity at the end of the apostolic age," the promise of the sealed portion wedged that door of communication open.²³

In this sense, revelations were understood not only as spontaneous instructions or visions that characterized the Doctrine and Covenants, but as knowledge grounded in the materiality of ancient records. During the same year Orson Pratt was celebrating ancient records and anticipating future revelations, Charles Penrose also wrote a discourse in which he identified the authorities of the Church as revelators of *records*, not just of divine inspiration: "We sustain our brethren of the twelve, as prophets, seers, and revelators . . . [to] show to God and to angels, that we are

ready at any time, if the Lord has a word of revelation to communicate to us, to receive it . . . whether by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost . . . [or] by means of the Urim and Thummim . . . until God brings forth everything needed for the building up of his work . . . and all the ancient records that have been lost will be brought to light.”²⁴ While urging the Saints to sustain the twelve as “prophets, seers, and revelators,” Penrose taught that sustaining did not “make those men prophets seers and revelators” as much as it signaled to God that they were ready to receive revelation from them in the approved “legal channels.”²⁵ The apostles were viewed as the source to which the Saints would look for the ancient records that had been promised. Prophethood, revelation, and records were thus inextricably linked.

Prophethood/Seership

Many Saints saw divine affirmation of Joseph Smith’s prophetic calling in his reenactment of the pattern of prophethood, records, and revelation established in the Book of Mormon. But as Richard Bushman points out, while Joseph Smith explicitly defined himself in the more encompassing office of prophet, it was his role as translator, or seer, which truly set him apart.²⁶ A seer, as defined by the Book of Mormon, had a higher status than that of a prophet, as the translation of records was a great spiritual gift. (According to the book of Mosiah, a seer is “greater than a prophet” and “can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed, or, rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light” [Mosiah 8:15–17]). The notion and reiteration of seership was unique to this period of early Mormonism. Contemporary Mormonism, in contrast, rarely makes reference to either the sealed portion or to seers, and does not substantively link seership with prophethood as in decades past (despite sustaining the twelve apostles and First Presidency as “prophets, seers, and revelators” at the biannual general conference).

But for early Saints, the promise of forthcoming records maintained the status of seers as translators. It was this gift of translation that Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Smith’s primary scribe, sought from God in what is now Doctrine and Covenants section 8. This

revelation promises Cowdery that he would “receive a knowledge concerning the engravings of old records” and “translate and receive knowledge from all those ancient records which have been hid up, that are sacred.” Even after Cowdery’s failed attempt at translating, another revelation reassured him that “other records have I, that I will give unto you power that you may assist to translate.”²⁷

The role of seer, or the “mighty one” (2 Nephi 20:34) as the Book of Mormon described it, was closely associated but distinct from that of prophet, and held substantial authoritative weight. Orson Pratt, writing in 1877, makes this evident in his musings regarding the sealed record: “When [the sealed record] is brought forth, I expect that the same Urim and Thummim which the Lord gave to Joseph Smith will come forth with these plates, and they will be translated, but by whom I know not. Who will be the favored Seer and Revelator that will be raised up among this people to bring this revelation to light, is not revealed to me.”²⁸ A year later, the defected David Whitmer used a stronger adjective in his response to queries concerning the sealed record. The plates, he explained, were residing “in a cave, where the angel has hidden them up till the time arrives when the plates, which are sealed, shall be translated,” until the time when “God will yet raise up a mighty one, who shall do his work till it is finished and Jesus comes again.”²⁹ But the aura of power that shrouded the role of seer, or the future translator of the sealed portion, was soon to be extinguished as the sealed portion, and the record-wielding seer, faded from mainstream Mormon thought.

Millennial Preparation

In another interview that same year, David Whitmer mentioned Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith’s vision of the cave full of plates, including the “portion of the gold plates not yet translated.” Pithily, he remarked that “when they are translated much useful information will be brought to light”;³⁰ that same year, Orson Pratt explained what kind of “useful information” that would be.

In his discourse, Pratt spoke of the preparations necessary for the millennium, which required organizing Zion (both structurally and spiritually) and receiving the sealed portion and other

lost records of scripture. The sealed portion and lost records would be particularly important to “teach the Latter-day Saints how to organize, how to be prepared” for the “great day that is to come,” namely through the Nephite model of the United Order.³¹ By this point, the law of consecration under the United Order was undergoing a problematic revival³²—but Pratt seemed to expect that success would come with proper instruction from the translated sealed portion.³³

Pratt also related the vision of the brother of Jared (contained in the sealed portion) to the knowledge requisite for millennial preparation: “And if it were important for [the brother of Jared], in the early ages, to understand the great things of the latter days, how much more important it is for us who are living, as it were, just preceding the coming of the Son of Man; and if ancient men of God were privileged and blessed in understanding the things of the future, how much greater blessing it will be to us, inasmuch as these things are at our doors.”³⁴ The sense of imminence mirrored other of Pratt’s exhortations, as evident in another declaration that “the Lord intends, in this dispensation . . . to overwhelm the whole earth with a flood of knowledge in regard to himself . . . [and] in regard to the preparation of the earth for the thousand years of righteousness to come. Hence . . . these great numbers of plates . . . as well as those sealed records of which I have been speaking, will all come to light.”³⁵

Many other leaders echoed the call for obedience and worthiness in order to ensure the speedy arrival of the sealed portion; one critical newspaper article in 1885 even satirized the idea that God was testing His people with the unsealed installment, and concluded that the absence of the promised sealed portion was proof that God “was not pleased with the result.”³⁶ In light of failed attempts at Zion’s Camp, the United Order, and the law of polygamy—all practices that were identified with the millennial society—many Saints may have concurred. It is likely that for this reason, the sealed portion ceased to become an object of anticipation, and began to serve instead as an incentive for righteous living. The words of Elizabeth McCune to the young women illustrate this impulse: “Seek for light . . . in the study of the Book of

Mormon . . . so that when the sealed portion of this sacred record comes forth, you will be prepared for it.”³⁷

A parallel to this form of purposeful obedience can be seen in the way Mormons began to view Zion, or the New Jerusalem, by the turn of the century. As Craig Campbell notes, the pronounced millennial fervor of early Saints, and their plans for establishing a literal, physical Zion, began to fade by the 1850s, after which the failed Jackson County episode was “often used as a spur to encourage the Saints to build up the Salt Lake Valley.”³⁸ Following the polygamy manifestos—which, as Jan Shipps describes, “signaled the beginning of the end of the extraordinary situation wherein Latter-day Saints had lived their lives in sacred space and sacred time,”³⁹ the expectations of establishing an Enoch-like society to usher in the millennium began to dwindle. By 1890, apostle James E. Talmage depicted the New Jerusalem in a way that “adhere[d] to the doctrine of a return to Independence but [gave] emphasis on the return occurring according to the faithfulness of the Saints”; and by 1900, with statehood and prosperity secured, Talmage “renewed a focus on the theme of disobedience of the people, which ostensibly caused the Lord to push the promised establishment of the New Jerusalem further into the future.”⁴⁰ Likewise, the sealed portion—once regarded with keen anticipation, then utilized as an incentive for righteousness—sank into the shadows of abstraction while the perpetually unmet conditions of obedience took center stage.

Delayed Millennium and Retrenchment (Twentieth Century)

While the polygamist manifestos at the turn of the century signaled a distinctive turning point in the millennial era of “sacred time and sacred space,” the mental transition into a more pragmatic paradigm was fraught with complexity. Theories regarding the sealed portion were reformulated in subtle ways to fit the new needs of an assimilating and expanding Church. One scholar describes the turn of the twentieth century as a time when “some of the most fundamental concepts of nineteenth-century Mormonism were reinterpreted to meet new social realities.”⁴¹ The demands of political and economic accommodation, as well as the emerging intellectual trends of scientism, rationalism, and higher criticism, redirected the attention of Church leaders to-

wards management of an increasingly institutional church, ordered within priesthood lines and stabilized by a focus on obedience and orthodoxy. Throughout the twentieth century, influences of fundamentalism, retrenchment, and what O. Kendall White, Jr. terms “neo-orthodoxy” oriented Mormon leaders’ concerns not toward apocalyptic paradigms, but toward temporally proximate matters, ironically relegating concrete doctrines like the Kingdom of God (Zion), charismatic spiritual gifts, and the sealed portion to the realm of abstraction and metaphor.⁴² It was more than temporal preoccupations that pushed these ideals into the realm of the indeterminate, however; a profound pessimism regarding mankind’s moral capacity rendered these ideals utterly unreachable.⁴³ Subsequent to World War I’s devastation, Mormonism’s widespread critique of Protestant liberalism and secular rationalism’s optimistic confidence in human nature (which optimism had originally been championed by Joseph Smith and his contemporaries, up through Widtsoe, Talmage, and Roberts) introduced a return to ideas more in line with the great Reformers and theologians such as Barth, Brunner, and Niebuhr.⁴⁴ As a result, by the end of the twentieth century, the sealed portion as a material source of revelation, prophetic stewardship, and millennial instruction had transformed into a symbol of mankind’s incapacity for faithful obedience, which would only be rectified at Christ’s coming.

Higher Laws and Probation

A 1914 *Liahona* article captures a moment of this paradigm shift well. The discourse deals directly with the question of records and revelations, and describes Cowdery’s anecdote of the cave of treasures, affirming that “the place where [the plates] have been hid up unto the Lord is described with precision.” Clearly, though, the edge of anticipation had already faded: the author tartly responded to those who listen “for the first time to the story of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon” and “almost invariably” ask after the whereabouts of the plates: “It should be of no concern to us where the records now are so long as a copy of the Book of Mormon is in evidence. Man has no right to question the Lord’s purposes; it is only a ‘wicked and idolatrous nation’ that

will ask for a sign.” Indeed, “it would be useless for mortal man to spend any time searching for them unless he has been instructed to do so by Supreme Authority” because “the plates are not for us yet to see until such a time as the Lord shall see fit to again bring them forth that we might know what the sealed portion thereof contains.”⁴⁵ Even the telling title for God as the “Supreme Authority” bespeaks a new preoccupation with obedience and order, while specifics of the plates are clearly secondary.

Several years later, Anthony Ivins’ conference address printed in the same Church magazine handled the whereabouts of the sealed portion with similar evasiveness: “Whether they have been removed from the spot where Mormon deposited them we cannot tell, but this we know, that they are safe under the guardianship of the Lord[.]”⁴⁶ Yet while he could assure his congregation that the records would be revealed “without doubt . . . in the not-distant future,” and his contemporaries confirmed more cautiously that such would happen “when the people of the Lord are prepared and found worthy,”⁴⁷ others began to advocate more stringent requirements.

Three years later, Joseph Fielding Smith specified that only when the Saints could “demonstrate [their] faith” and heed the “lesser teachings” would God keep his promise to restore the sealed records to his people.⁴⁸ In the meantime, however, their “faith [was] on trial,” and unfortunately, he continued, “the indications point to the fact that our faith is weak, and therefore we are not prepared to receive these greater revelations which will come forth when men are sufficiently humbled, prayerful, obedient, and filled with faith, such as the brother of Jared had.”⁴⁹ Ironically, as people’s capacity to qualify for the sealed portion apparently dwindled, the criteria seemed to rise: in the same sermon, Joseph Fielding Smith asserted that “this revelation of all the ages cannot come forth until the hearts of men are prepared to receive it in perfect faith . . . willing to accept *all* the words of the Lord without doubts and mental reservations.”⁵⁰ The “higher teachings” had a high price, indeed.⁵¹

Whereas the early Saints had set out in full vim and vigor to keep a “higher law”—focusing more on unity, selflessness, and purity in preparation for the imminent millennial day—the strains of orthodoxy and retrenchment that set the tone after the turn of

the century did not allow for such optimism. Some splinter groups, however, did approach the higher law more sanguinely. Just as Heber Kimball taught the Saints in 1856 that they had to live the higher law first before Zion could be gathered⁵² with the clear expectation that such could be accomplished, later fundamentalist leaders proved even more confident of their capacity to live the higher law. The 1950s fundamentalist Rulon C. Allred claimed that the higher law, i.e. consecration and polygamy, was contained within the sealed portion, and while general church membership might not be capable of receiving that portion and observing the higher law, he and other select members apparently could. And “when *they* [the LDS Church] strive to live all that they have, the higher principles will again be given to *them*.”⁵³

Around the same time, Joseph White Musser, a high councilman from Salt Lake, also exploited the mythology of the sealed portion to promulgate the “milk” of monogamy before the hearty “meat” of polygamy: “Children must needs be fed milk before meat. It is more than likely the historians of the [Book of Mormon] record were impressed not to present this marriage principle in fulness in the abridgement . . . [but] when the sealed portion of the record is available the same will be found to be set forth with clearness and positiveness.”⁵⁴ It is not unlikely that such heterodoxy proved worrisome to Church leadership and contributed to their growing distance from the dangerously adaptable sealed portion.⁵⁵

Mainstream LDS leaders from Joseph Fielding Smith to President Kimball and Bruce R. McConkie refocused the attention of the members away from the “higher law” to the principles already revealed. Smith stated in 1931 that the LDS Church was placed “on probation” by the Lord—and for failing to “live up to the requirements in this probationary state” God would “hold from [them] those other things which one time will be revealed.”⁵⁶ But until such obedience was manifest, he reproved on another occasion, “why should we clamor for more when we will not abide in what we already have?”⁵⁷ President Kimball, after rehearsing an instance where President Smith had asked for a raise of hands of those who would read the sealed portion if it were given, rebuked the eager for not reading the present Book of Mormon, conclud-

ing: “Many people want to live the higher laws when they do not live the lower laws.”⁵⁸ McConkie frequently affirmed that “the milk,” or the translated portion of the Book of Mormon, must precede the “meat” found in the sealed portion.⁵⁹ This continued stress on being tried and found wanting sank in for at least one lay member: one Robert English’s autobiography records, “God promised us that he would deliver to us the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon just as soon as his people have accepted the portion already given. But we have not received it, so it is obvious that we are not prepared for it.”⁶⁰

Prophethood without Records

Splinter groups and dissenting fundamentalists highlighted another dangerous element of the sealed portion—the aura of power around the sealed portion and the seer. One writer opined that the Reorganized Church would receive the remainder of the gold plates, and the “Utah Church” would not; consequently, numbers of members would fall away from the “Utah Church” to join the Reorganized.⁶¹ And while Orson Pratt had mused over the identity of the “favored Seer and Revelator” of the sealed portion, others infused this role with more authority. Clyde Neilson and Dale Lowell Morgan looked forward to this “Seer” or “Eighth Priest” to rescue the Church from its polluted state, having forsaken polygamy and consecration. In *From the Dust They Shall Speak Again: The Sealed Records or the Great Convincing Act*, they asserted that the time was ripe for the “Seer spoken of in 2 Nephi 3:7 . . . the Eighth Priest” to come forth and “translate the sealed part of the records, which will be done in power, glory and majesty to the convincing mankind of the divinity of Jesus Christ and Joseph Smith and the work he did.”⁶² Several years later, in 1958, Ross W. LeBaron, a member of a powerful fundamentalist sect, wrote a letter recounting a personal revelation in which the “Mighty and Strong” one (the seer as described in D&C 85:7) was identified as a future Indian Prophet who would “bring forth the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon.”⁶³ Even the more modern personal letters of one Gail Porritt reflect an intense preoccupation with the question of “WHO WILL DO THE TRANSLATING?” (Porritt, inciden-

tally, believed his patriarchal blessing confirmed his own identity as the chosen one).⁶⁴

In contrast to (or perhaps, as a consequence of) these fringe figures, the notion of prophethood became increasingly divorced in the mainstream Church discourse from records and seership, and, consequently, from the Restoration process. While early Church writings showed a clear association between prophets, records, and an open canon as a vital combination for millennial preparation, later sermons radically altered this relationship by viewing the millennium as a distant and uncontrollable event, and the restoration as an event already completed, or one that will culminate after Christ returns. In 1966, McConkie claimed that “this is the great era of restoration . . . [where] all the truths had in ages past shall be restored . . . and lost scriptures . . . [are] yet to come,” and several years later, he rebuked that

it is our habit in the Church—a habit born of slovenly study and a limited perspective—to think of the restoration of the gospel as a past event But the restoration of the wondrous truths known to Adam, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham has scarcely commenced. The sealed portion of the Book of Mormon is yet to be translated[.]⁶⁵

While this may seem reminiscent of Pratt’s enthusiastic calls to prepare for the cascade of records that would pour forth throughout God’s restoration, McConkie takes it in a different direction: “All things are not to be revealed anew *until the Lord comes*. The greatness of the era of restoration is yet ahead.”⁶⁶ The concept of the sealed portion was a significant symbol of the continuation of the Restoration and a technically open canon. Yet by emphatically declaring the records to be unavailable until Christ comes again, any genuine preparation on the part of the members to ask or prepare for such knowledge was futile. The restoration process is not a millennial preparation, but a millennial culmination; hence, the canon was functionally closed.

In the wake of the functionally closed canon, the notions of “revelation” and “prophet” underwent similar definitional restructuring, being stripped of their associations with translation and records. Even up until 1965, this association was still intact, as

evident in this excerpt on the role of prophets from a proposed Church curriculum:

Ask the students ‘Will these future prophets also bring forth new direction and guidance for us as church members?’ When answered, put up the book with the question mark—signifying books to be revealed in the future. The teacher might also have students tell of the following to be received in the future: 1) The sealed portion of the Book of Mormon plates, given to Joseph Smith, Jr. 2) The revelations from Christ to the Lost Tribes plus their own written history. [Reference to 2 Nephi 29:11-14] 3) Any other examples the students or teacher wish to bring out.

In contrast, current LDS manuals make no mention of records, let alone sealed portions, in their discussions of prophets, revelation, or scripture. Furthermore, the idea of an open canon, so vividly described in 2 Nephi 29 and celebrated by Orson Pratt and other early Saints in terms of the restoration of sacred records, now refers primarily to non-canonized verbal declarations of living prophets and leaders. Less prominent figures such as Rodney Turner and Avraham Gileadi have differed, arguing that the restoration of the records is still a part of the Restoration process and a significantly preparatory pre-millennial event, even constituting what Gileadi identified as God’s actual “great and marvelous work.”⁶⁷

Millennium

Perhaps the most fundamental change in the LDS approach to the sealed portion is that the revelation of the sealed portion no longer functions as a preparatory pre-millennial event. As certainly as the Book of Mormon had heralded the opening of the dispensation, the revelation of the sealed portion was expected to herald its convergence with the millennial era. Because many nineteenth-century groups including Mormons believed the millennium to be at the very door, the linkage of the sealed records to millennial preparation not only was seen as a logical precondition, but also gave a much more proximate, literal tone to the discussion of the sealed portion’s advent. Yet by the 1970s, Bruce R. McConkie was stating confidently that the sealed portion would be part of a millennial project, only to be commenced by Christ.⁶⁸

Instead of Orson Pratt’s pre-Millennial utopia, where the

whole earth would be flooded with the knowledge of God in preparation for his coming,⁶⁹ McConkie asserted that “There is going to be another . . . great period of enlightenment, when [Christ] comes; and at that time he will reveal all things, such as the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon.”⁷⁰ “But,” he continued elsewhere, “I am clear in my mind that the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon will not come forth until the Millennium.”⁷¹ This assertion, repeated over the years various times and with increasing emphasis on the sealed portion’s complete inaccessibility to the Church, culminated in a categorical assertion that “we have no such hope” in any records coming forth before the millennium.⁷² Apparently, this new timetable stuck, and by 1988, Rodney Turner surmised that “most commentators believe that these revelations will not be had again until the millennial reign of Christ,” (though he himself disagreed with McConkie’s interpretation).⁷³ Paradoxically, McConkie taught that “without any question, . . . the scripture that is yet to come forth, which will reveal more of the mind and will and purposes of the Lord than any other, is the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon”—yet it was also the one utterly out of reach. Why? “The answer is obvious. They contain spiritual truths beyond our present ability to receive. Milk must precede meat, and whenever men are offered more of the mysteries of the kingdom than they are prepared to receive, it affects them adversely.”⁷⁴ This last statement of McConkie’s, published the year of his death, reflects the downward trajectory in terms of optimism about man’s ability to receive and comprehend future revelations. It is also a stark contrast to Orson Pratt’s advice in an 1877 sermon: “Now perhaps some of you may say, ‘Withhold these things; do not send angels; do not bestow the gifts of prophecy, if by being so blessed we are in danger of apostatizing from our religion.’ This is the other extreme; on the other hand, we are commanded to seek the face of the Lord always, that we may possess our souls in patience.”⁷⁵

Of course, there were others that suggested different views. Neal A. Maxwell was one consistent and gentle voice that counterbalanced McConkie’s disavowal of the sealed portion during the 1980s and 1990s, admonishing the Saints to be aware of the absence of the sealed portion, among other lost records, and to look

forward to their return with “anxious expectation.”⁷⁶ Recent years have witnessed only a smattering of references, while serious treatments of the sealed portion have emerged only from the Maxwell Institute, an academic arm of the Church dedicated to the study of ancient scripture, and from splinter groups, with full-fledged translations emerging from the Brotherhood of Christ Church or the Worldwide United Foundation, among others.⁷⁷ For all intents and purposes, however, the sealed portion has faded from mainstream discussions in the Church.

Conclusion

After decades of being admonished to not “clamor for more,” and with discourse that continually emphasizes certainty and celebrates “having the fulness” of the Gospel, twenty-first century Saints are immersed in a rhetoric of satiety. The sense of yearning and incompleteness, or even galvanizing admonishment, has been replaced with completeness and plenitude—restoration as a *fait accompli*. The focus isn’t so much on seeking truth and preparing for revelation as it is perfecting the application of what has already been given.⁷⁸

This has rendered the question of the sealed portion merely academic, and seemingly a superfluous concern. The passion that fired a generation of Mormons to anticipate a deluge of revelation that would only accelerate in coming years has been tempered by the demands of correlation, fears about the fragmenting power of rampant revelation, and leadership’s concerns about the distractions of speculation from the staid and steady purposes of Zion-building. Well might a nineteenth-century Pratt bemusedly juxtapose, “A Book of Mormon, a Book of Mormon, We have a Book of Mormon. Why is there need for more?” with the contemporary idea that there is “enough to save and exalt us now.”⁷⁹ Such is a far cry from his confident exclamation that “there is nothing too great to be withheld from the Saints of God in the last dispensation of the fullness of times.”⁸⁰

This rhetoric of satiety and mandated preoccupation with heeding what has been given (as opposed to what has been promised, i.e. the sealed portion) may have created another irony regarding the concept of faith. Scottish Congregationalist George Macdonald opined that “they that begin first to inquire will soon-

est be gladdened with revelation; and with them [God] will be best pleased, for the slowness of his disciples troubled him of old.”⁸¹ Orson Pratt himself often reminded the Saints that they would receive the sealed portion only if they did not fail to “inquire of [God],” or God would “withhold the greater information.”⁸² Yet in a culture of certainty, faith is measured in terms of conviction, not thirst; it is what we affirm, not what we seek, that becomes the gauge of faithful discipleship. But the line between faithful acceptance and spiritual passivity becomes dangerously blurred when the very mechanism by which we are to acquire revelation (“ask, and it shall be given you”) can be viewed as a spiritual flaw instead of a spiritual gift. This, indeed, would put the sealed portion, and all other revelations, forever out of reach.

Notes

1. Roger D. Launius, “An Ambivalent Rejection: Baptism for the Dead and the Reorganized Church Experience,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23, no. 2 (June 1990): 69.

2. “Notes and Queries,” *The Guardian*, n.d. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/notesandqueries/query/0,5753,-4563,00.html> (accessed April 25, 2012). (accessed April 25, 2012). See also Christopher Nemelka, trans., *The Sealed Portion: The Final Testament of Jesus Christ* (Worldwide United Foundation Organization, 2008); and The Brotherhood of Christ Church, *The Sealed Portion of the Brother of Jared: Volume I* (Leawood: Leathers Publishing, 2001).

3. According to volume 1 of Dan Vogel’s *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), Orson Pratt’s 1839 and 1840 account, Orson Hyde’s 1842 account, Joseph Smith’s description to Daniel Rupp (1843), Lucy Smith’s interview in 1842 with Henry Caswall, and William Smith’s interview with James Murdock (1841) all describe the plates with virtually identical words, including the mention that “a part of which was sealed” or “some of them are sealed together and are not to be opened, and some of them are loose.” William Smith’s account also says, “The pages which he was not to translate were found to be sealed together, so that he did not even read them and learn their contents” (479). David Whitmer’s later interviews also report that “The plates, as I saw them, were fastened with three rings. About half of them were loose and movable, but the others were solid, as if sealed” (Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:85, 133).

4. David Whitmer said “a large portion” and “about half,” as cited in Kirk B. Henrichsen, “How Witnesses Described the ‘Gold Plates,’” *Jour-*

nal of Book of Mormon Studies: 10, no. 1 (Provo: Maxwell Institute, 2001), 16–21. Orson Pratt (not a direct witness) said two-thirds: see Pratt, “The Faith and Visions of the Ancient Saints,” April 13, 1856, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1854–86), 3:347b. A 1907 article says one-third: “Ancient American Prophets,” *Liahona, the Elders’ Journal*, 23 (November 23, 1907): 630–632. George Q. Cannon also says that only one-third was sealed: Cannon, *Life of Joseph Smith*, (Nabu Press, 2010), 45; also as cited by Bruce R. McConkie, “Gold Plates,” in *Mormon Doctrine* (Bookcraft, 1958). Both Bruce R. McConkie and Gordon B. Hinckley cite the two-thirds portion described by Orson Pratt: McConkie, “The Bible—A Sealed Book,” Church Education Symposium, Brigham Young University, August 17, 1984; and Hinckley, *Truth Restored* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1972), 14–15.

5. Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:85, 133. In an interview with the *Chicago Times*, Smith explained that the angel had told him “very impressively that the loose plates alone were to be used, and that the sealed portion was not to be tampered with.”

6. Orson Pratt, December 9, 1877, “King Limhi’s Enquiry,” *Journal of Discourses*, 19:217b.

7. “The Gold Bible, No. 4,” *The Reflector* (Palmyra, New York) 2, no. 13 (February 14, 1831), 100–101.

8. See Kirk B. Henrichsen, “How Witnesses Described the Gold Plates,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 1 (2001), 16–21; see also Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 1:479, 4:30, 5:13, 85, 133, 161, 164, and 290).

9. Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, “Letter IV,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland, Ohio) 1, no. 5 (February 1835), 80.

10. Orson Pratt, “The Faith and Visions of the Ancient Saints, etc.,” April 13, 1856, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:347b.

11. Pratt’s assertion was reaffirmed three years later in 1859 by an article in the *Millennial Star*, which stated that the sealed portion of the plates “contained a sacred revelation given to the brother of Jared.” “Originals of the Bible and Book of Mormon,” *The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star*, no. 37, September 12, 1859. A catechism in W. M. Egan’s *Our Deseret Home* in 1882 broadened the contents to include a “revelation giving an account of the world’s history from the foundation to the ends thereof.” Egan, *Our Deseret Home* 1, (1882), 236. A 1927 *Improvement Era* article followed this trend, identifying the sealed portion as both “an account of those great things which were shown to the brother of Jared . . . and also the revelations given to John, the beloved, on Patmos.” J. Sjordahl, “Notes on the Book of Mormon,” *Improvement*

Era, 1927. Three years later, *Liahona: the Elders' Journal*, identified the revelations as the "portion of the brother of Jared's vision which Moroni, in his abridgement, said should not be opened." John Foote, "Plates of the Book of Mormon," *Liahona: The Elders' Journal* 27, no. 21, (April 1, 1930): 896.

12. *Journal of Discourses*, 19:38.

13. *Journal of Discourses*, 4:105; see also Cameron J. Packer, "Cumorah's Cave," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 13, no. 1 (2004): 50–57, <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/jbms/?vol=13&num=1&id=338> (accessed July 12, 2011).

14. Orson Pratt, *Orson Pratt's Works* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1851): chap. 8, "Evidences of the Book of Mormon and Bible compared."

15. P. W. Poulson to editors of the *Deseret News*, August 13, 1878, *Deseret News* (August 16, 1878), 2. Interview between Edward Stevenson and David Whitmer—Where are the plates now?

[Whitmer]: In a cave, where the angel has hidden them up till the time arrives when the plates, which are sealed, shall be translated. God will yet raise up a mighty one, who shall do his work till it is finished and Jesus comes again.

[Poulson]: Where is that cave?

[Whitmer]: In the State of New York.

[Poulson]: In the Hill of Comorah [sic]?

[Whitmer]: No, but not far away from that place);

See also Pratt, "King Limhi's Enquiry, etc.," *Journal of Discourses* 19:218b. Oliver Cowdery's account of seeing the "wagonloads" of plates in the cave with Joseph is in Monte Nyman, "Other Ancient American Records Yet to Come Forth," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no.1 (2001): 52–61, <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/jbms/?vol=13&num=1&id=338> (accessed July 14, 2011).

16. *The Evening and the Morning Star* 1, no. 1 (June 1832): page 1, column 2. It is interesting to note that this reference was on the first page of the first edition.

17. Pratt, "King Limhi's Enquiry, etc.," *Journal of Discourses*, 19:218b, emphasis mine. See also another sermon in 1877, where he wrote that he had "no doubt the generation will have passed away that were living in 1829; but all things will be added to those revelations that the Lord gave to that generation, namely, the records of the ancient Nephites . . . the records . . . that revealed all things from the foundation of the world to the end thereof, records that were kept when Jesus administered to the Nephites . . . all of which are to come forth." Pratt, "Revelation Gradual, etc.," May 20, 1877, *Journal of Discourses*, 19.

18. “David’s Reflections: The Very Latest from the Newest Heavenly Kolob: NEW DANIEL COME TO JUDGMENT: Which it is David Whitmer’s Book, Showing the True forwardness of the Latter-day Diabolism—Murder Will Out—Tell the Truth and Blame the Devil,” *The Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, XXXIII, no. 42 (December 11, 1887).

19. Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, “Letter IV,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland, Ohio) 1, no. 5 (February 1835), 77–80

20. Orson Pratt, “The Faith and Visions of the Ancient Saints, etc.,” April 13, 1856, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:347b; see also Pratt, “Revelation Gradual, etc.,” *Journal of Discourses*, 19:14a–14b. “But first,” says the Lord, “I will try my people; I will perfect them; I will see whether they will be obedient to my commandments; I will reveal to them little by little; I will give them line upon line; I will impart a little light upon this subject and upon the other subject: and if my people shall inquire of me, in relation to these things, then I will teach them still more, giving them another line and another precept, I will issue forth another commandment; but if they do not inquire of me, and their hearts be found full of covetousness, and they feel in their hearts to slight these things which I have given to them, then I will withhold the greater information; I will not let them know the law which I gave to the ancient Nephites; I will withhold many things calculated to benefit them, until they learn the things that they are already taught. But when they become obedient students, obedient men and women of God, obedient to my commandments, hearkening to the voice of my servants, giving heed to the whisperings of my spirit, doing away with covetousness, then I will reveal more.”

21. Orson Pratt. *A Series of Pamphlets* (Liverpool, England: R. James, Printer, 1848), 9.

22. Terry Givens, *The Latter-day Saint Experience in America* (Greenwood Press, 2002), 144.

23. Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (University of Illinois Press: 1985), 33. For a thorough treatment of the early American history of the open canon, see David F. Holland, *Sacred Borders: Continuing Revelation and Canonical Restraint in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

24. Charles Penrose, “The Word of the Lord,” November 29, 1879, *Journal of Discourses*, 21:47b.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Richard Bushman, “Joseph as Translator,” in *Believing History*, edited by Reid Neilson and Jed Woodworth (Columbia University Press, 2004), 235. Bushman points out that Joseph Smith always “subordinated his role as translator to the more encompassing office of prophet,” and

the “tangible evidence of Joseph’s divine calling was the Book of Mormon and the miraculous translation of the hieroglyphs.”

27. *Ibid.*, 236.

28. Pratt, “King Limhi’s Enquiry, Etc.,” *Journal of Discourses*, 19:217b.

29. P. W. Poulson interview with David Whitmer, *Deseret Evening News*, 2. Emphasis mine.

30. Edward Stevenson, *Reminiscences of Joseph, the Prophet, and the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*, quoted in Cameron J. Packer, “Cumorah’s Cave,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 13, no. 1 (2004): 50–57, <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/jbms/?vol=13&num=1&id=338> (accessed July 14, 2011).

31. Pratt, “Revelation Gradual, etc.,” *Journal of Discourses*, 19:14a.

32. Matthew Bowman, *The Mormon People* (Random House, 2011), 114–115.

33. Thomas Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 6.

34. Pratt, “King Limhi’s Enquiry, Etc.,” *Journal of Discourses*, 19:216a.

35. *Ibid.*, 19:217b.

36. “David Whitmer on his Death Bed.” *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 17, 1885.

37. “New Year’s Greetings,” *The Young Woman’s Journal* 12, no. 1 (January 1901), 40.

38. Craig Campbell, *Images of Jerusalem* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 151.

39. Shipps, 125–126.

40. Campbell, 150.

41. O. Kendall White, Jr., *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy* (Signature Books, 1987), xv.

42. White, Jr., xiv–xv, and Alexander, 288–289. See also Alexander, 288, for Heber J. Grant’s response to the disagreements among Widstoe, Talmage, and Smith that captures the essence of this attitude: “No good can be accomplished by dealing in mysteries. . . .”

43. Alexander points to an interesting example of this move: Lorenzo Snow announced in 1900 that many “under the sound of his voice” would “have to go back to Jackson County and assist in building the temple,” yet Joseph F. Smith and his counselors “downplayed the imminence of the millennium” by revising Pratt’s *Key to the Science of Theology*: removing passages predicting the nearness of the millennium, and treating the millennium in general, not apocalyptic, terms (Alexander, 288–289).

44. White, Jr., xiii.

45. Lizzie O. Borgeson, "Where Are the Records or Plates from which the Book of Mormon Was Translated?" *Liahona: The Elders' Journal* 34 (February 17, 1914), 570–72.

46. Anthony Ivins, "Conference Address of President Anthony Ivins: The Purchase of the Hill Cumorah," *Liahona: The Elders' Journal* 25, no. 24 (May 15, 1928), 847.

47. J. Sjodahl, "Notes on the Book of Mormon," *Improvement Era*, 1927.

48. Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection* (Deseret Book, 1949 edition), 339. Excerpts published first in 1931 by the Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine.

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*, 337

51. Others, such as President Rudger Clawson, held to such standards with slightly more optimism; he closed a 1940 Conference Report with this musing: "I am of the opinion that if we were perfectly prepared and followed carefully the revelations and instructions we have already received in the Church possibly that sealed portion could be brought to the people through faith and good works." Rudger Clawson, "The Sealed Portion of the Book of Mormon," *Report of the Semi-Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, April 1940 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, semi-annual).

52. *Journal of Discourses*, 4:106.

53. Quoted in Lyle O. Wright, "Origins and Development of the Church of the Firstborn of the Fulness of Times," (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University College of Religious Instruction, 1963): Appendix D. Rulon C. Allred, *Polygamist* [1950s], p. 216. Allred declared himself a member of the church, supporter and sustainer of President McKay, but that because of a special dispensation given to John Taylor to keep the "higher principles" alive among select members, he practiced polygamy and therefore he and his followers gathered outside the Church. *Emphasis mine.*

54. Joseph White Musser, *Celestial or Plural Marriage* (1944), 21–22, quoted in Dean C. Jessee, "A comparative study and evaluation of the Latter-day Saint and 'Fundamentalist' views pertaining to the practice of plural marriage" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University College of Religion, 1959).

55. President Heber J. Grant considered Musser "impudent" (Alexander, 72), and it is likely that Musser's ideas, unpopular as they were, may have contributed to the LDS Church distancing itself from the sealed portion as well as from the fundamentalists, much like the cur-

rent LDS Church distances itself from the notion of polygamy and the fundamentalist sects that practice it today.

56. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 4 vols., compiled by Bruce R. McConkie (Bookcraft, 1956), 3:201–202.

57. *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

58. *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 532. See also *Selected Writings of Daniel H. Ludlow*, Gospel Scholars Series (Deseret Book Company, 2000), 6.

59. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary* (Deseret Book, 1981), chap. 117, “Expounding the Scripture.”

60. Robert W. English, *Autobiography* (self-published, n.d.). http://www.worldcat.org/title/autobiography/oclc/253596418&referer=brief_results (accessed July 30, 2011).

61. C.J. Hunt, “Sacred Records—Balance of Book of Mormon Plates,” *SH* 76 (March 6, 1929), 271–74.

62. Clyde Neilson and Dale Lowell Morgan, *From the Dust They Shall Speak Again: The Sealed Records or the Great Convincing Act* (N.p., 1945), 5.

63. Ross W. LeBaron, letter to Margarito Bautista, December 6, 1958, quoted in Wright, 1963. The Church of the Firstborn of the Fulness of Times is a Mormon fundamentalist sect headquartered in northern Mexico that was founded in 1955 by Joel LeBaron and members of his family. They were involved with Joseph Musser at one point.

64. Avraham Gileadi, “The Great and Marvelous Work Yet to Come Forth,” n.d. (most likely 1970s–80s), found among the materials in Paul R. Cheesman Papers, Box 24, fd. 2., Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo. Emphasis in the original.

65. Bruce R. McConkie, “Ten Keys to Understanding Isaiah,” October 1973 General Conference, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1973/10/ten-keys-to-understanding-isaiah?lang=eng> (accessed August 3, 2011).

66. *Ibid.*

67. Gileadi, “The Great and Marvelous Work Yet to Come Forth.”

68. McConkie, “Ten Keys to Understanding Isaiah.”

69. Pratt, “King Limhi’s Enquiry,” 217b.

70. Bruce R. McConkie, “This Generation Shall Have My Word through You,” *Ensign*, June 1980.

71. Bruce R. McConkie, “The Doctrinal Restoration,” in *The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Truths*, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Robert L. Millet (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1985), 15.

72. *Ibid.*, 16. See also his discussion on the sealed book in McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Deseret Book, 1985); McConkie,

“The Bible—A Sealed Book,” *Church Education Symposium*, Brigham Young University, August 17, 1984; McConkie, *Millennial Messiah: The Second Coming of the Son of Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), esp. the section “The Dispensation of the Fullness of Times”; and *Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), esp. chap. 117, “Expounding the Scripture.”

73. Rodney Turner, “The Three Nephite Churches of Christ,” in *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture: Paper from the First Annual Book of Mormon Symposium*, edited by Paul R. Cheesman (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988).

74. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 443.

75. Orson Pratt, “Book of Mormon, etc.,” July 18, 1875, *Journal of Discourses*, 18.

76. Neal A. Maxwell, *But For a Small Moment*, (Provo: Deseret Book, 1986), esp. chap. 2, “A Choice Seer.” See also Maxwell, “Yet Thou Art There,” *Ensign*, November 1987, 30; Maxwell, “For I Will Lead You Along,” *Ensign*, May 1988, 7; Maxwell, “From the Beginning,” *Ensign*, November 1993, 18; and Maxwell, *A Wonderful Flood of Light* (Bookcraft, 1990), 18.

77. For a sampling of other references to the sealed portion: Robert J. Matthews, “The Restoration of All Things: What the Doctrine & Covenants Says,” in *Heavens Are Open: The 1992 Sperry Symposium on the Doctrine and Covenants and Church History*, edited by Byron R. Merrill (Deseret Book Company, 1993); Donovan J. Fleming, “Their ‘Best Shot,’ *BYU Speeches*, June 17, 1997. For Maxwell Institute treatments of the sealed portion, see Monte S. Nyman, “Other Ancient American Records Yet to Come Forth,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 1 (2001), 52–61; Valentin Arts, “A Third Jaredite Record: The Sealed Portion of the Gold Plates,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 11, no. 1 (2002), 50–59; Cameron J. Packer, “Cumorah’s Cave,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 13, no. 1 (2004), 50–57; and see translations noted previously in the introduction.

78. See the following talks for examples of this: Thomas S. Monson, “Finding Strength through Obedience,” October 2009 General Conference (“There is no need for you or me in this enlightened age, when the fullness of the gospel has been restored, to sail uncharted seas or travel unmarked roads in search of the fountain of truth. For a loving Heavenly Father has plotted our course and provided an unfailing map—obedience!”); Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “The Way of the Disciple,” April 2009 General Conference (“The gospel of Jesus Christ is taught in its fullness in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”).

79. Spencer W. Kimball, *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Deseret Book Company, 1982), chap. 19. Quote dated May 31, 1948.

80. Pratt, "The Book of Mormon," August 25, 1878, *Journal of Discourses*, 20:76b.

81. George Macdonald, "The Higher Faith," *Unspoken Sermons* (NuVision, 2007), 26.

82. Pratt, "Revelation Gradual, etc.," *Journal of Discourses* 19:14b.