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### Understanding Christian Baptism through the Book of Mormon

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**Abstract:** Early Christianity saw a wide proliferation of theories and practices concerning baptism, and now many Christians, including Mormons, commonly understand it as a means to repent and wash away one's sins. But the Book of Mormon prophets taught that baptism is a covenant and a witnessing to God that one has already repented and commits to follow Jesus Christ, and that sins are remitted by the Holy Ghost.



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J. Kirk Richards, *The Baptism of Christ*, oil on canvas. Courtesy J. Kirk Richards.

# Understanding Christian Baptism through the Book of Mormon

*Noel B. Reynolds*

Latter-day Saint discourse has long featured and benefited from two different New Testament metaphors in explaining and understanding water baptism. The first is the near universal insight used widely by Christians and pagans alike that washing in water can signify spiritual purification, a washing away of sin or contamination (see Acts 22:15–16, “For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou has seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord”). The second is the more specifically Christian insight of Paul that immersion in water can represent the burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see Rom. 6:4, “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life”). What seems to have gone largely unnoticed in LDS discourse is that discussions of baptism in the Book of Mormon offer instead a third understanding of baptism: that baptism is a witnessing to God of one’s repentance and commitment to follow Jesus Christ. All three of these distinct portrayals can be seen as consistent with each other, and together they invite faithful followers to think more deeply about Christian baptism.

The claim that the Book of Mormon provides a well-developed and distinctive understanding of water baptism may be surprising to some of its readers. Nevertheless, the Nephite writers consistently explain baptism as a convert’s witness to the Father and to the people that the convert covenants to always remember Christ and to keep his commandments, with the understanding that the remission of sins then comes by fire and the Holy Ghost. In this article, I will analyze Book of Mormon teachings about baptism, explore possible connections to covenant traditions in ancient Israel

**Noel B. Reynolds**

This study of baptism is part of my long-range project to understand how the Book of Mormon presents the gospel or doctrine of Jesus Christ. First from a scholarly perspective, and then as a mission president, I have come to appreciate the clarity and power with which the Book of Mormon teaches this essential ordinance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I am fascinated that the New Testament embraces the essential importance of baptism, as when Jesus commanded the



Apostles to go and teach all nations, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19). Yet the New Testament leaves much unanswered about the intended meaning and actual functions of baptism in the process of conversion. As a result, a wide variety of eclectic baptismal practices and explanations proliferated in the early centuries of Christianity. In my own life and in the lives of baptismal candidates with whom I have worked, it makes all the difference in the world that baptism is seen as a voluntary covenantal act by the convert required for the remission of sins, which forgiveness always comes through the agency of the Holy Ghost—when sins are washed away, it is the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost sent by the Father, and not the waters of baptism, that accomplishes this forgiveness. To the extent that popular Christian or LDS understandings of baptism miss these plain and precious truths, which are clearly and consistently articulated by Book of Mormon writers, they miss many great and marvelous things.

and the New Testament, and examine the meaning of “baptism for the remissions of sins.” Then, after reviewing the range of possible meanings of baptism found in the New Testament, which one may harmonize through the Book of Mormon, I will discuss how instead of achieving harmony, the understanding of baptism in the first five Christian centuries ran in many directions of disharmony and confusion.

## THE BOOK OF MORMON ON BAPTISM

While phrases such as “baptism . . . for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; and elsewhere), as well as the ritual process of immersion in water, can suggest to the mind the idea of being washed clean in the water, the Book of Mormon consistently points to a different symbolism: the making of a covenant. At least two studies have noted the preeminence of covenant in Book of Mormon discussions of baptism. Richard L. Anderson has said, “The Book of Mormon brings us closer to God because no scripture more specifically ties the Christian ordinances of baptism and the sacrament to the covenant concept.” Craig J. Ostler has written:

The subject of baptism is a familiar one in the New Testament. This is especially true of the Gospel accounts, in which their first common topic is the ministry of John the Baptist (Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3; John 1). However, the importance of baptism as an ordinance of the gospel of Jesus Christ and an understanding of why baptism is given such a place of importance are not generally as familiar. . . . The Book of Mormon clarifies the covenant nature of baptism.<sup>1</sup>

As I have explained in earlier essays,<sup>2</sup> the Book of Mormon writers consistently include water baptism as one element of what they call the “gospel” or “doctrine of Christ,” the way “whereby men can be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Ne. 31:21). Three definitional passages, all quoting Jesus Christ or the Father, spell out this specific way in a six-point formula, namely that all must (1) believe or trust in Christ, exhibiting faith in him; (2) repent of their sinful ways, turning to God and accepting his direction in all things; and (3) make a commitment to obey the commandments of God and witness that covenant to the Father publicly by water baptism. All who take these steps in full sincerity are promised that (4) they will receive the remission of sins by the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost. But this spiritual rebirth alone is not enough. Nephi quotes both the Father and the Son telling him (5) that only those who then “endure to the end” (6) will be saved in the kingdom of God (2 Ne. 31:14–15). This article builds on these previous studies by showing more specifically how the Book of Mormon describes baptism as a convert’s public witness to the Father and how this ordinance precedes the remission of sins through the baptism of fire, sanctification, and ultimately exaltation.

### Baptism Is a Witness of Repentance unto the Father

The Book of Mormon makes it clear that baptism of water is the divinely prescribed symbolic act whereby repentant converts to Jesus Christ can witness to the Father that they have repented and covenanted to keep his

commandments. The root passage that lays out this concept is found in 2 Nephi 31, in which Nephi saw the baptism of Christ in vision and understood it as the model for all people. Explaining the baptism of Jesus, Nephi says, “He humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments” (2 Ne. 31:7). In his own voice, and quoting the Son, Nephi twice emphasizes that baptism is a witness to the Father of both a commitment to keep his commandments and a willingness to take the name of Christ upon oneself (2 Ne. 31:7, 13–14). Though Christ was sinless, Nephi explains, it was necessary for him to humble himself like the repentant convert and to witness publicly his covenant to be obedient to the Father. In this sense, Jesus himself had to be baptized “to fulfill all righteousness” (2 Ne. 31:5–6; compare Matt. 3:15); his baptism was more than a means to show sinners the way back to the Father.

All Book of Mormon baptismal accounts follow this model. After setting forth a set of obligations assumed in baptism (Mosiah 18:8–9), Alma invited Helam to be “baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you” (Mosiah 18:10).<sup>3</sup> Then, at the waters of Mormon, Alma included in the baptismal prayer itself the characterization of baptism “as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him [the Almighty God] until you are dead as to the mortal body” (Mosiah 18:13). After their conversion following the preaching of Ammon, the people of King Limhi desired “to be baptized as a witness and a testimony that they were willing to serve God with all their hearts” (Mosiah 21:35). Teaching the people of Gideon, the younger Alma used identical language and describes “going into the waters of baptism” as the means by which his converts can witness to their God that they are “willing to repent” and to “enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments” (Alma 7:15). Immediately prior to the Savior’s visit to the Nephites after his resurrection, a later Nephi described baptism not only as “a witness and a testimony before God” but also as a witness “unto the people, that they had repented and received a remission of their sins” (3 Ne. 7:25). In teaching and administering the bread and wine to the Nephites personally, Jesus told them it was to be given “to those who repent and are baptized in my name” as a witness “unto the Father that ye are willing to do that which I have commanded you” and “that ye do always remember me” (3 Ne. 18:10–11).

It becomes clear in these texts that the decision to be baptized is made by the new converts and that the act of baptism itself is characterized as the converts’ witnessing publicly to the Father and the people that they have

repented of their sins and have entered into a covenant to take the name of Christ upon them and to keep his commandments from that time forward.<sup>4</sup> According to Book of Mormon teaching, the decision to remit their sins is made by the Father. Remission of sins is accomplished when repentant converts are baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost—an experience which is sometimes characterized, following King Benjamin (Mosiah 5:6–7), as being born of God and which can occur before or after baptism—again emphasizing that it occurs at the discretion of the Father.

Joseph Smith is also on record using similar imagery: “Baptism is a sign ordained of God, for the believer in Christ to take upon himself in order to enter into the kingdom of God,” and again more explicitly, “Baptism is a sign to God, to angels, and to heaven that we do the will of God.”<sup>5</sup> This teaching captures much of the central symbolism in the Book of Mormon accounts of baptism in water and may very well have been inspired by that source.

A surprising implication of this Book of Mormon language is that the covenant the convert signals at baptism is actually made before baptism and is the central element of repentance. Genuine repentance always includes a deliberate commitment by the penitent person to turn to Christ and walk in his path—taking his name upon oneself and keeping his commandments. Baptism and repentance are thus linked together: baptism completes repentance.

Indeed, the concept of repentance in Book of Mormon discourse focuses on the idea of “turning away” from the ways of the flesh or our own paths in life and choosing to walk with Jesus Christ in the straight and narrow path defined by his commandments and communicated to us by his servants or by the Holy Ghost.<sup>6</sup> This turning is a choice, an act of human agency. The ideas of turning and coming unto Christ point to the covenantal aspect of repentance. Not only must the repentant sinner leave off sinning, he must also make a positive commitment to the Savior to keep his commandments, to enter the strait gate, and then to walk the straight and narrow path, as he comes unto Christ (2 Ne. 31:17–18). This covenant—to remember Christ always, to take the name of Christ upon oneself, and to keep all Christ’s commandments—is part of this process of turning and coming and is therefore a crucial element of repentance.

This is the covenant that is witnessed to God and to the entire world by the convert through baptism of water. The choice to repent is a choice to burn bridges in every other direction, deciding to follow forever only one way, the one path that leads to eternal life.<sup>7</sup> It is this privately made covenant that will be witnessed publicly at baptism and periodically thereafter through the taking of the sacrament. And it is referred to appropriately as the “baptismal” covenant.

Alma articulated this plainly to the Nephites in Gideon when he invited them to “lay aside every sin” and “show unto your God that ye are willing to repent of your sins and enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments, and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of baptism” (Alma 7:15; see also 2 Ne. 31:7, 13–14). It is in this simple sense that those who repent “are the covenant people of the Lord” (2 Ne. 30:2).

Soon thereafter, Alma taught Zeezrom and others at Ammonihah that God “has all power to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance” (Alma 12:15, 33; 13:13; see also 34:30), and Mormon wrote to his son Moroni that “the first fruits of repentance is baptism” (Moro. 8:25). Repentance is incomplete without baptism, and baptism is meaningless and ineffective without repentance.

So, according to the Book of Mormon, baptism is essential for salvation: not only must all men and women repent, they must publicly witness to the Father that they have repented and that they will keep the commandments and take Christ’s name upon them for the rest of their lives. Jacob affirmed that “the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel,” commands “all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name . . . or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Ne. 9:23–24). This requirement may have been news to Lehi and Nephi when they were shown the baptism of Jesus in their vision at the first camp in the wilderness. Evidence from the Bible and other ancient sources suggests that their fellow Israelites in 600 BC probably did not share this understanding. But Nephi made it standard for his people, and it continued through the practice of Alma and the Nephite church down to the time of Christ, when it was prominently reemphasized by the Savior himself in his visit to the Nephites. Describing the missionary successes just prior to the Savior’s visit, the record emphasizes that “there were none who were brought unto repentance who were not baptized with water” (3 Ne. 7:24).

### **The Partaking of Bread and Wine Reenacts the Covenantal Witnessing of Baptism**

The covenantal nature of baptism is reaffirmed in the Book of Mormon by its understanding of the sacrament of the bread and wine as a renewal of the baptismal covenant. After the resurrected Christ himself instructed the Nephite Christians, they understood that the bread and wine symbolize and remind participants of his body and blood, sacrificed for all mankind and especially for those who will repent and be baptized.

And this shall ye do in remembrance of my body, which I have shown unto you. And it shall be *a testimony unto the Father* that ye do always remember me. . . . And this shall ye always do to those who repent and are baptized

in my name; and ye shall do it in remembrance of my blood, which I have shed for you, that ye may *witness unto the Father* that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you. (3 Ne. 18:7, 11, emphasis added)<sup>8</sup>

The prescribed sacrament prayers (Moro. 4:3; 5:2) precisely recapitulate the converts' witnessing to the Father, renewing their prior witness of the covenant they had made to take upon themselves the name of Christ, to keep his commandments, and to remember him always. The prayers also include a reminder of the promise from the Father that those who do these things will "have his Spirit to be with them"—to cleanse of sins, to witness of the Father and the Son, and to guide those who are striving to endure to the end, telling them "all things what [they] should do" (2 Ne. 32:5; see also 2 Ne. 31:18; 3 Ne. 11:35–36). While the Book of Mormon only speaks of covenanting in the process of conversion at one point in that process, namely at the time of repentance (Mosiah 5:2–9), the Nephites were commanded to bear witness of that covenant not only that one time through baptism but also repeatedly by participation in the sacrament (3 Ne. 18:7, 11, 12; Moro. 6:6). The regular recapitulation of the baptismal witnessing was apparently designed to strengthen participants in their continuing efforts to remember their Lord Jesus and to endure to the end.

### **The Remission of Sins—The Spiritual Rebirth**

If the Book of Mormon prophets understood baptism as a witnessing to God and not a washing by God, how did they understand the remission of sins and its connection to baptism? The gospel or doctrine of Christ, as delineated most clearly in the Book of Mormon through the words of his prophets and of Christ himself, spells out the way in which fallen and sinful men in the world can find their way to holiness and eternal life with God.<sup>9</sup> The Book of Mormon description of this process is emphatically dialogic in character,<sup>10</sup> requiring a succession of actions and responses between the individual man or woman and the Father. One significant problem with seeing baptism as the event that cleanses the convert from sin is that it confuses the agency involved; it misconceives the convert's required action as God's. This can be clearly demonstrated by a consideration of the principal elements of the gospel message.

Men and women encounter the gospel first as a commandment or invitation to repent and come unto Christ. This message may come from a book of scripture, a missionary, or another follower of Christ, but ultimately the invitation comes from Christ and the Father themselves. One central purpose of this world is to provide an environment in which the spirit children of the Father can choose whether or not and to what extent they will respond to

this invitation. The hearer may choose to resist or ignore the call, or he can respond positively by implicitly trusting in Christ (exercising faith) and fully repenting (covenanting to follow him). This is all a very private dialogue in the heart and soul of the individual. But the covenant is witnessed publicly when the responsive individual submits to water baptism—“a witness and a testimony before God, and unto the people” (3 Ne. 7:25). The promised response from the Father, depending on the sincerity of the repentance, is the remission of sins that comes, at the discretion of the Father, through “the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost” (2 Ne. 31:17). But this is not the end of the dialogic interaction, for the person baptized has only entered the gate that leads to the straight and narrow way to eternal life. The convert must now “endure to the end,” an intensely dialogic process in which one must seek and receive the guidance of the Holy Ghost continuously, which will “show unto you all things what ye should do” to become holy and to fulfill the covenant made previously as part of one’s repentance (2 Ne. 32:5). The final step in this process comes at the judgment when the Lord bestows eternal life and celestial glory on those who have sought his guidance and endured to the end in this way. Jacob provides a succinct summary: “And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God. And if they will not repent and believe in his name, and be baptized in his name, and endure to the end, they must be damned; for the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has spoken it” (2 Ne. 9:23–24).

This dialogic process sorts out quite simply. The invitation or commandment to repent comes to one from God. The individual responds by resisting or accepting. Acceptance of the invitation is an act of faith that requires repentance, including a covenant to follow Christ and take his name upon oneself. Repentance is demonstrably completed when the convert enters the waters of baptism as a witness to God and all men that he or she has in fact made this covenant. The dialogue continues as the Father then responds to these acts of the repentant person by sending the promised remission of sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost, which also witnesses of the Father and the Son to the person baptized (2 Ne. 31:17–18, 3 Ne. 11:35–36). In the following and longest phase of the dialogue, the newly baptized member seeks daily guidance and receives it through the Holy Ghost in a continuing process until the end of his or her mortal life, after which the Lord completes the dialogue and welcomes the person into his presence and grants the long-promised celestial glory and eternal life. In contrast, the Protestant Reformation doctrine that men can do nothing essential to influence this process completely contradicts the crucial dialogic process described in the Book of Mormon. Similarly, the baptism of infants and

young children, who do not sin and are not required to repent, is forbidden in the Book of Mormon.<sup>11</sup>

The frequently repeated command of the Lord to all people that they should “come unto me” strongly reinforces the Book of Mormon interpretation of baptism as the act of the person baptized, which may subsequently be rewarded in a reciprocal act of the Father, who sends the remission of sins. The most common elaborations of the phrase “come unto me” incorporate both repentance and baptism into that invitation. Nephi makes this clear: “The gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost” (2 Ne. 31:17). Mormon specifies, “As many as did come unto them [the church leaders], and did truly repent of their sins, were baptized in the name of Jesus, and they did also receive the Holy Ghost” (4 Ne. 1:1). In closing the book of 3 Nephi, Mormon quotes Christ’s invitation to the future Gentile nations to “repent . . . and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, that ye may receive a remission of your sins, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (3 Ne. 30:2). When he first speaks from heaven to the Nephite survivors of the great destructions, Jesus twice teaches them that “whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost” (3 Ne. 9:20).<sup>12</sup>

In light of this dialogic sequence, it is clear that the Nephite prophets did not conflate the convert’s submission to baptism with the Father’s remission of sins. The baptism of water and the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost are intimately connected but are radically distinguished as separate events initiated by different agents.<sup>13</sup> The distinction is crucial, as the following discussion of the remission of sins and how the Book of Mormon prophets distinguished it from water baptism will show.

With apparently the same idea that Christ can forgive our sins through his Atonement and the shedding of his own blood, Alma inquires of his straying flock in Zarahemla if they can say that their sin-stained “garments have been cleansed and made white through the blood of Christ” (Alma 5:27). But these scriptures do not identify baptism as an ordinance that would bring remission of sins. Rather, Alma specifies that he has been called to teach them “that they must repent and be born again” (Alma 5:49) like the humble and repentant converts who have previously been “sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Alma 5:54). To all who would receive this message, Alma issues an invitation: “Come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life” (Alma 5:62).

Nowhere in Alma’s teachings are the waters of baptism equated with the blood of Christ, which can cleanse the repentant sinner or his sin-stained garments. Book of Mormon writers consistently regard the Holy Spirit as the

cleansing agent. The principle of cleansing is set forth initially by Nephi as he recounts what he learned in his vision of the baptism of Jesus Christ, during which he was instructed in the basic principles of the gospel or doctrine of Christ by the voices of both the Father and the Son. He summarizes, “The gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; *and then cometh a remission of your sins* by fire and by the Holy Ghost” (2 Ne. 31:17, emphasis added). A dramatic example of this reception of the Holy Ghost in purifying power is reported at the conclusion of King Benjamin’s sermon. Overcome by “the fear of the Lord” and viewing their own sinful state, the people cried:

O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. . . . And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come. (Mosiah 4:1, 2–3; compare 11–12)

As Benjamin’s people respond, recognizing the “mighty change” in their hearts wrought by “the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent,” they profess a willingness “to enter into a covenant with [their] God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things” (Mosiah 5:2, 5). Benjamin then explains to them that because of this experience and their righteous covenant, they will be “called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters,” for they have been “spiritually begotten” of him, for their “hearts are changed through faith on his name,” and they “are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters” (Mosiah 5:6–7). In this passage, they recognize the blood of Christ as the price paid for their sins, the Spirit as the cleansing agent, and the covenant as the means by which they become Christ’s children.<sup>14</sup>

Alma used Benjamin’s terminology of spiritual rebirth to describe his own conversion experience. The dramatic confrontation with the angel left the wicked young Alma helpless and unconscious for over two days. As he revived, following the fasting and prayers of his father and the other priests, he stood and announced that, after repenting of his sins, he had been redeemed and “born of the Spirit” (Mosiah 27:24). He then reported the Lord’s words to him while in his coma, where he was told that all mankind “must be born again” or “born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters” (Mosiah 27:25). In his later preaching, Alma would call upon others to “repent and be born again” (Alma 5:49) and be baptized that they “may be washed from [their] sins” (Alma 7:14).

Taken by itself Alma 7:14 has sometimes been read to indicate that baptism of water washes away sins, but the ensuing verse 15 makes it clear that for Alma baptism is a witness to God:

Now I say unto you that ye must repent, and be born again; for the Spirit saith if ye are not born again ye cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may be washed from your sins, that ye may have faith on the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, who is mighty to save and to cleanse from all unrighteousness. Yea, I say unto you come and fear not, and lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset you, which doth bind you down to destruction, yea, come and go forth, and show unto your God that ye are willing to repent of your sins and enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments, *and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of baptism.* (Alma 7:14–15, emphasis added)

Baptism is a step that God requires of converts, but it is he who will wash away sins through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The agency is preserved here: Alma says “*be washed*”; the convert does not wash away his own sins by being baptized. The wording “come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may be washed from your sins” can be read grammatically to mean that it is the repentance, not the baptism, that leads to being washed from sins. Further, the context of the language of spiritual rebirth used by Jesus, Nephi, and Alma in the Book of Mormon indicates clearly that it is the Spirit or Holy Ghost who brings the remission of sins. Alma also teaches that no man can be saved “except his garments are washed white, . . . purified, . . . [and] cleansed from all stain, through the blood” of the prophesied Redeemer (Alma 5:21).

One might reasonably wonder at this point about the dual imagery: On the one hand sinners must be washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. On the other, it is the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost that brings the remission of sins, purifying people in a remarkable personal experience that leaves them feeling clean and free of sin. The first image is particularly arresting because human experience shows that blood is one of the most difficult and filthy contaminants to remove from clothing. Rather than cleansing white things, it stains them permanently. No doubt, the prophets who employed this image in their writings intended to emphasize the miraculous effects of the sacrifice of his own blood by which Christ gained the power to remit our sins. But it is only a metaphor, and no blood is sprinkled on the convert or his clothes. Rather, the Holy Ghost is sent by the Father as the active agent that purges souls of sin, so that converts have no more desire to sin. The power of combining the two images is demonstrated in Alma’s account of the ancient order of high priests:

[And they] were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb. Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God. (Alma 13:11–12)

All of these passages understand that the cleansing is done by the Spirit and they conform to the Savior’s final teaching to the Nephite disciples that “whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled” with the Holy Ghost (3 Ne. 27:16; see also 3 Ne. 12:6). All men are commanded to repent and come unto him and be baptized in his name, that they “may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost,” that through the resurrection they may “stand spotless before [him] at the last day” (3 Ne. 27:20; see also Moro. 6:4). Moroni ends the Book of Mormon on this note, pointing to the fact that it is this purification from God alone that produces the perfection required of men by God. He then summarizes the full gospel message by inviting all men to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him. . . . And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot” (Moro. 10:32–33). This would seem to have been Nephi’s meaning almost a thousand years earlier when he said, “For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Ne. 25:23).

It may be useful at this point to refer briefly to the profound account of Adam’s baptism preserved in the report of Enoch’s preaching, as restored by Joseph Smith in his new translation of the Bible (Moses 6:51–68). Because this passage is fully compatible with the Nephite record, I consider here only its uniquely formulated conclusion: “For by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified” (Moses 6:60). In other words, converts keep the commandment to repent and witness that repentance to the Father by going into the waters of baptism; the Father then justifies them, remits their sins, or enables their righteousness by cleansing them with his Spirit—by baptizing them with fire and with the Holy Ghost; and through the sanctifying power of Christ’s atoning blood, all men and women who have thus entered in by the way can become sanctified as they endure to the end in obedience to Christ and his commandments, as guided by the Holy Ghost. While this exceptionally detailed and rich account given to Enoch to be taught to “all men, everywhere” (Moses 6:57) is fully compatible with the Book of Mormon prophets, it does not provide interpretive insights that extend beyond what is found

in the Nephite writings, and so I will not refer to it or explore it and related scriptures further.

### **Reconciling the Baptismal Symbols of Witnessing and Washing Away (or Remitting) Sins**

It seems significant that Alma and subsequent Book of Mormon writers do not seem to claim originality for the symbols or metaphors they use in explaining baptism. Rather than taking literary license, they seem to see themselves as faithfully preserving a vocabulary that has come originally from the Father and the Son in direct speech as recorded by Nephi in his extended account of his vision of the baptism of Christ in 2 Nephi 31.<sup>15</sup>

The Book of Mormon understanding of baptism as a witness by the convert to the Father, combined with the understanding that remission of sins comes by fire and the Holy Ghost, sheds important light on a number of scriptures that could suggest that baptism washes away our sins. For example, when the Savior invites future Gentiles to “come unto me, and be baptized in my name, *that ye may* receive a remission of your sins, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (3 Ne. 30:2, emphasis added), one can see that baptism is the culmination of the repentance process, all of which is necessary for the remission of sins, and that being filled with the Holy Ghost is the means by which that remission will come after the ordinance of baptism.

Phrases sequencing baptism as a precursor to the remission of sins are likewise seen in the Doctrine and Covenants and the Articles of Faith. For example, Martin Harris is told to “declare repentance and faith on the Savior, and remission of sins by baptism, and by fire, yea, even the Holy Ghost” (D&C 19:31). This conforms readily with the Book of Mormon pattern. The wording of a similar message given to Ezra Thayre and Northrop Sweet seems to articulate explicitly the same clarification: “repent and be baptized, every one of you, for a remission of your sins; yea, be baptized even by water, and then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost” (D&C 33:11). Similar language appears in Article of Faith 4: “baptism by immersion for the remission of sins.” And Doctrine and Covenants 20:5 and 55:1 make it clear that remission of sins is *received* from God, not taken or done by the convert.

### **INTERACTING WITH NEW TESTAMENT UNDERSTANDINGS OF BAPTISM**

With the Book of Mormon understanding of baptism clearly in mind, one may compare and elucidate the meanings and metaphors of baptism found in the New Testament. The publication of Everett Ferguson’s monumental 900-page *Baptism in the Early Church* in 2009 makes this an opportune time

to draw such comparisons. While scholarly interest in Christian baptism was manifest through much of the last century, Ferguson's comprehensive work has brought discussions of all dimensions of the topic to a new level of clarity and documentation.<sup>16</sup> In this exhaustive study, he brings together a careful reading and comparison of all relevant texts from the first five Christian centuries and the scholarly literature that has arisen from them, showing the variety of competing understandings and practices that sprang up. Ferguson reports baptismal practices as recorded in the New Testament, in the writings of early Christian Fathers, and in other Christian sources. These records give evidence of variant practices regarding issues such as the authority required to perform baptism; the required steps of baptism, such as instruction, repentance, confession, oaths, and renunciation of Satan; and the mode of baptism, such as the number of immersions, anointing, foot washing, the spoken ceremony, receiving the Holy Spirit, association with the Eucharist, and baptism of children. While Ferguson's efforts can help unravel baptism's symbolism and meaning and have identified a collection of unresolved issues, Ferguson cannot resolve all of them, and in fact this shows why the Bible and early Christian writings will probably never be sufficient to settle the debates over the practice of baptism as Jesus originally taught it or to answer the questions about how baptism should be understood or practiced today. For Latter-day Saints, the Book of Mormon provides coherent and attractive resolutions to many of these historical and theological disputes, as the following examples illustrate.

### **John's Baptism *unto (eis)* Repentance and Remission**

All New Testament accounts of baptism derive directly or indirectly from Christian understandings of the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist.<sup>17</sup> The similarities and differences between baptisms performed by John and the water baptism as instituted by Jesus and his disciples are never articulated in scripture, leaving it unclear how the baptisms performed by John and the disciples of Jesus should be understood. While numerous scholars have claimed to find precedents for Christian baptism in both Jewish and non-Jewish ritual washings and convert initiations, Ferguson's careful review of all these claims finds them wanting<sup>18</sup> and vindicates the observation of Albrecht Oepke that the Christians' coinage of a new term (*baptisma*) for their singular ritual reflects their understanding that it was to be distinguished from all these earlier practices (*baptismos*).<sup>19</sup>

Three basic texts report that John the Baptist was "preaching the baptism of repentance *for (eis)* the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; emphasis added) or that he was baptizing "with water *unto (eis)* repentance" (Matt. 3:11,

emphasis added). One of the questions arising from this language concerns the meaning of the Greek preposition *eis*, which is translated in these passage as “for” or “unto,” but which can also be translated as “with regard to” or “in order to,” thus giving us the translations “baptism with regard to repentance” and “baptism of repentance in order to bring about the remission of sins.” These alternate translations fit easily with the Book of Mormon teaching, which portrays baptism as an act of the convert that completes the repentance process—and often signals that meaning by use of the phrase “baptized unto repentance.”<sup>20</sup>

The baptismal language of the synoptic Gospels echoes that of John the Baptist, who is quoted as saying that he baptized *with water* in contrast to the one following who would baptize *with fire and with the Holy Ghost* (Luke 3:16; see also Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:4). What is the role of water in baptism? The answer is far from settled. While traditional Christian interpretations of these passages often have assumed that water baptism itself brings the remission of sins, others understand that remission of sins is accomplished by the Holy Spirit—a view that finds support in writings from Qumran.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, traditional translators and commentators—many of them nineteenth- and twentieth-century Protestant ministers—have commonly seen this phrase as indicating that water baptism completes repentance and is necessary for full repentance or as a testimony or external sign that one has repented,<sup>22</sup> while in addition their references to John’s baptism usually include an indication that the baptism is “for the remission of sins,” or they refer to the “baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost” that will follow.

Illuminated by these examples of discrepancies, the New Testament baptismal language associated with John the Baptist, which seems to link the remission of sins directly to baptism, can be clarified. The root references (Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3) stipulate that baptism is “*of repentance* for the remission of sins” (emphasis added). That qualification may well invoke the same point as the Book of Mormon, that baptism is the completion or fulfillment of repentance. The related formulation “baptize you with water unto repentance,” which occurs both in Matthew 3:11 and in the Book of Mormon, even more clearly portrays baptism as a completion of the repentance process.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Agent of Remission**

Several New Testament passages using this language go on to refer directly to the Spirit, suggesting that the Holy Ghost will be the means by which the resulting remission of sins can come. I suggest that “baptism for the remission of sins” can be read as a shortened version of “baptism completes

repentance, and remission of sins comes separately through the Holy Spirit.” This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that none of these passages<sup>24</sup> mentions both the remission of sins *and* the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost. Rather, they mention one or the other, suggesting that for John the Baptist and his hearers these may have been equivalent. Only later does Peter bring these two phrases together at Pentecost: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for . . . all” (Acts 2:38, NIV), which still can be understood as a sequential process in which the purification of sin is brought about by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The idea taught by Alma in the Book of Mormon, that fallen men could repent and be washed clean in the blood of Christ, was also taught, just that simply, in the New Testament. But in neither of these books of scripture does the washing in blood necessarily refer to water baptism. John the Revelator spoke of Christ as the one “who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev. 1:5) and preached that “if we walk in the light . . . the blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).<sup>25</sup> These scriptures do not identify baptism as an ordinance that would bring remission of sins.

### **Symbolic Meanings of Baptism**

Baptism acquired a wide range of symbolic meanings in New Testament times, including burial and resurrection, entrance into the household of God, supersession of pagan ways, or Jewish circumcision. Not only was it seen as a recapitulation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the spiritual life of every convert (Rom. 6:4–6), it was also seen significantly as a symbol of his or her entry into the church, the community of believers (Acts 2:38–41). This seems to be Paul’s only meaning when he says “we [are] all baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13) and when he says that converts have “been baptized into Christ” and, having “put on Christ,” are therefore “all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:27–28). Addressing the Colossians, Paul makes the related point that because Christ has triumphed over all other claimed spiritual principalities and powers, his followers need no longer worship or revere traditional ritual practices or shrines. Rather, their baptism is “the circumcision of Christ,” or a symbol of the new covenant, referring implicitly to the circumcision of the flesh that had long been the symbol for Israelites of the covenant of Abraham to be obedient to Jehovah and to be known as his people (Col. 2:8–20, especially 11).

While this variety of symbolic meanings enjoys a sense of richness and fullness, it should not be allowed to overshadow the essential role of baptism as a public witness of the convert's internal commitment. Interestingly, while Joseph Smith clearly saw the covenantal element of baptism, he still felt compelled to clarify the meaning of Colossians 2, by stating that "circumcision is not baptism," and that while circumcision was appropriate for infants under the law of Moses, baptism for the remission of sins cannot be rightly administered to sinless children under the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>26</sup> Paul presciently warned against false baptismal symbolisms that strayed off the path. Denying any latitude for multiple interpretations of the faith, he stressed the unity of the baptized community (Eph. 4:4–6). He forcefully reminded the Corinthians that in baptism, it is the name of Christ only that they have taken upon themselves, and not the name of the missionary who taught and baptized them (1 Cor. 1:12–13).

### **Immersion Witnesses the Making of a Covenant**

The most thorough and recent historical scholarship identifies very early Christian teachings and practices that strongly suggest their earliest formulations may well have been identical with those found in the Book of Mormon. Ben Witherington, a leading Evangelical theologian, follows Augustine and sees in baptism as understood in the New Testament church what is essentially a symbol, "a sign of a covenant," or a pledge to live the Christian life, combined with an appeal to God to bless one to be able to keep that pledge.<sup>27</sup> This conclusion, reached after his exhaustive review of previous scholarly literature on the topic, is surprisingly close to the language of the Book of Mormon. It echoes earlier conclusions reached by François Bovon that, for the earliest Christians, baptism was a sign of the covenant.<sup>28</sup> This understanding of baptism reaches back into the New Testament. Ferguson includes 1 Peter 3:20–21 in his survey of New Testament texts and explains why he interprets this difficult passage to say that "baptism is a pledge of loyalty to God; it proceeds from a motive of inner purity and is not an act of external cleansing."<sup>29</sup> Ferguson relies on John H. Elliott's recent translation: "Baptism now saves you too—not [as] a removal of filth from the body, but [as] a *pledge* to God of a sound mindfulness of God's will" (emphasis added).<sup>30</sup> This single New Testament passage, seen by one prominent commentator as "the nearest approach to a definition [of baptism] that the New Testament affords,"<sup>31</sup> suggests that the earliest Christians may have principally understood the symbolism of baptism in much the same way as did the Book of Mormon prophets.

In his comprehensive review and critique of original sources and scholarly interpretations, Ferguson emphasizes the role of baptism itself as a sign and finds that New Testament writers persistently associated baptism with a spiritual cleansing and the gift of the Holy Spirit, which Paul saw as a divine seal of the covenant and the equivalent of circumcision. So “those who brought spiritual circumcision into relation to baptism made the equation most often not of baptism itself with circumcision but saw baptism as the occasion for the inward circumcision by the Spirit.”<sup>32</sup> This would explain why both baptism and the anointing and laying on of hands related to the Holy Spirit were referred to as seals (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13) and why the two ordinances were permanently conflated in Christian practices by the third century.

This leads directly to other unanswered questions: If baptism is not to be understood as a washing away of sin, what is the connection between witnessing a covenant and being immersed in water? In the same vein, why is it necessary in the weekly witnessing of the covenant that covenanters eat the bread and drink the wine/water? There are obviously two levels of symbolism here; the acts of submitting to baptism and of taking the sacrament each constitute a witnessing to the Father. But what then do the baptismal waters represent? And while we are told directly in scripture and in the sacrament prayers themselves that the bread and wine/water represent the body and blood (life) of Christ sacrificed for us, the scriptural accounts do not explain why we must ingest them.

While Paul’s attractive metaphor that immersion represents death, burial, and rebirth (Rom. 6:4) comes to mind immediately as symbolizing a type of ritual ordeal, I will focus first on the traditional practices more commonly associated with covenant making in ancient Israel, upon which, on first impression, Paul seems to build. Bible scholars have noticed a profound and detailed similarity between Israelite covenant practices and formulae and the treaty covenants of their ancient neighbors, an enduring pattern that is also reflected in the Book of Mormon. Understanding the ancient Israelite treaty-covenant pattern may cast some light on the scriptural accounts of baptism and sacrament. Key elements identified in those ancient traditions that might have explanatory value for our questions include witnesses and oaths, curses and blessings.

*Witnesses and Oaths.* The ancient treaty covenant was “essentially an elaborate oath” and required witnesses.<sup>33</sup> Local gods were commonly invoked in this role as they would be around a long time and could carry out punishments against covenant breakers. But heaven and earth and even rocks and hills in the locale could serve as witnesses as well, as is the case repeatedly in the biblical examples. The ceremonies used anciently for

swearing to a covenant took various forms. As Delbert Hillers documents, these could require eating together or drinking from a cup. More frequently, they involved cutting up an animal. Israelite covenanters would walk in single file between the cut parts, a practice that is preserved in the modern Samaritan Passover. Or the covenanter could make a sign, such as drawing his finger across his throat, indicating the consequences he would expect if he breaks the covenant. (On a related note, perhaps the sacrament prayers instruct recipients to remember Christ's sacrifice of blood and body as a reminder that if they do not remain faithful to their covenants, they will have to suffer for their own sins.)

Linking Christian baptism to these ancient antecedents shows a striking connection between immersion and drowning. The word the earliest Christians used for baptism, the Greek verb *baptizo*, carried the meaning of being overwhelmed by water or of sinking, as in the sinking of a ship.<sup>34</sup> Clearly, immersion could be used to signal how death or punishment could come to the potential covenant breaker. Mircea Eliade confirms that, universally, "immersion is the equivalent . . . of death."<sup>35</sup> Water baptism is obviously a different sort of covenant-making action than killing animals and signing violent consequences of broken oaths, and I have found no scriptural or historical explanations for that difference. It can, however, be noted that while the penalties indicated in those ancient treaties were literal dismemberment and physical death, the promised cursing for breakers of the baptismal covenant is spiritual death. Spiritual death would leave the body unmarked, and so would death by drowning. This interesting common aspect could explain the use of immersion in water for the baptismal witness or oath.

*Cursings and blessings.* The ancient covenant formulae also included lists of cursings and blessings that would come to the recipient according to whether he violated or observed the terms of the covenant. The oaths, as described above, implicitly or explicitly referred to these cursings, which often included a violent death. The eating and the drinking from the cup was one way that these curses could be infused "into the very body of the swearer."<sup>36</sup> This might explain why the tokens of the Savior's body and blood must be ingested (compare Num. 5:23–24). This speculation requires a strong link between baptism and the sacrament that is not recognized by modern scholars of the early church but is fundamental to LDS understanding of the sacrament as presented and explained to the Nephites in the Book of Mormon by the Savior himself.<sup>37</sup> Everett Ferguson, for example, explains the eventual association of the Eucharist with baptism as an accidental development from the fact that baptisms were often administered on the first day of the week—as was the Eucharist.<sup>38</sup>

Applying this model to baptism and the sacrament suggests that the blessings could correspond to the promise that in this life the obedient recipient “may always have his Spirit to be with him” (Moro. 4:3, 5:2) and that he might receive eternal life in the life to come. The cursing that is not mentioned in the sacrament prayers but that is fully discussed in many other places is spiritual death, which is the direct opposite of the promised blessings—the withdrawal of his Spirit or being cut off from the presence of the Lord in this life, and the second death in the world to come. The spiritual nature of these cursings and blessings is emphasized in the Book of Mormon when the Savior warns against allowing the unworthy to partake of the bread and wine, for he “eateth and drinketh damnation to his soul” (3 Ne. 18:29), but the righteous partaker is promised that he will eat “of my body to his soul” and drink “of my blood to his soul; and his soul shall never hunger nor thirst, but shall be filled” (3 Ne. 20:8). Or, as the Savior puts it in his third major presentation of his gospel to the Nephites, “And he that endureth not unto the end, the same is he that is also hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence they can no more return, because of the justice of the Father” (3 Ne. 27:17). This also fits well with the New Testament account of spiritual birth or being born again, which is also emphasized by Alma, who was told by the Lord to “marvel not that all mankind . . . must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness,” thus becoming “new creatures” (Mosiah 27:25, 26). For that experience to have lasting value, the convert must be baptized and receive the Holy Ghost and endure to the end, obeying the commandments and the promptings of the Spirit. The failure to endure in this manner will result in spiritual death.

### **Baptism as a Symbol of Death, Burial, and Rebirth**

Returning now to Paul’s metaphor that baptism reenacts the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:4), one likely explanation for Paul’s baptism-as-burial metaphor could be that it exactly captures the universal symbol of immersion in and coming up out of the water as a death and rebirth, a symbolism that would have been well known to Paul’s listeners in the religious world of the Mediterranean. According to Eliade:

In cosmogony, in myth, ritual and iconography, water fills the same function in whatever type of cultural pattern we find it; it *precedes* all forms and *upholds* all creation. Immersion in water symbolizes a return to the pre-formal, a total regeneration, a new birth, for immersion means a dissolution of forms, a reintegration into the formlessness of pre-existence; and emerging from the water is a repetition of the act of creation in which

form was first expressed. Every contact with water implies regeneration: first, because dissolution is succeeded by a “new birth”, and then because immersion fertilizes, increases the potential of life and of creation. In initiation rituals, water confers a “new birth”, in magic rituals it heals, and in funeral rites it assures rebirth after death. Because it incorporates in itself all potentiality, water becomes a symbol of life (“living water”).<sup>39</sup>

It is easy to see why this universal symbolism of immersion would appeal to Paul as a powerful tool for making some of his points to Christian members, just as it has proven attractive and useful to so many early Christian theologians and to scripture interpreters of the Restoration. It vividly invokes the imagery of death and rebirth. “Water purifies and regenerates because it nullifies the past,” says Eliade.<sup>40</sup> This may be the context for Ezekiel’s prophecy of a future day of which Yahweh promises: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you” (Ezek. 36:25; compare Zech. 13:1). As Eliade points out, this interpretation permeates numerous patristic writings and is eloquently developed in different centuries by such important Christian writers as Tertullian and John Chrysostom. Similarly, he finds plentiful examples in Greek and Roman literature. It is reflected in the ritual immersions of the statues of divinities, particularly of goddesses, and was “very common in the cults of Cretan and Phoenician goddesses, and among certain Germanic tribes. . . . This immemorial and oecumenical symbolism of immersion as an instrument of purification and regeneration was adopted by Christianity and given still richer religious meaning,” namely the redemption of the soul.<sup>41</sup>

As a ritual enactment of death, burial, and rebirth, baptism for Paul may have had some connection to the traditional covenant ceremonies of Israel, but this popular metaphor actually transforms the structure of those ceremonies, for he represents the “old man . . . of sin” (Rom. 6:6) as something we leave in the waters of baptism, to rise with new life as did Christ in the resurrection. Although this imagery is both beautiful and inspiring and has successfully captured the attention of many Latter-day Saints, it is also unique to Paul and does not seem to fit easily with the covenant language of the scriptures or Israelite tradition. While this idea of baptism can be equated with Alma’s being born again, which brings newness of life for the repentant sinner, the metaphor of rebirth does not overtly accommodate the threatened spiritual death or curse that is acknowledged by a covenanter as he swears to keep the covenant and promises not to fall back into his sinful ways. Nor does it recognize that the spiritual rebirth is usually expected to have followed repentance and thus to have preceded baptism

itself. As noted previously, many of the Nephite prophet-interpreters saw in baptism the witness of the person being baptized to the fact that they have repented sincerely and thus have already been born again.

While it is easy to appreciate the rhetorical power invoked by this universal symbolism in Christian and LDS discourse, Restoration scriptures point Latter-day Saints back to the covenant traditions of Adam, Abraham, and Moses as the more promising contexts for explicating baptismal and sacramental symbolism.

### **THE WIDE PROLIFERATION OF BAPTISMAL THEORIES AND PRACTICES**

As has been shown, the Book of Mormon and the New Testament both employ a similar set of symbolic ways of understanding baptism. While the post-Apostolic Christian understanding and experience could have been that small set of explanations harmoniously embracing the doctrine that baptism was the witness of a covenant or pledge made by repentant believers, the early centuries of Christianity saw instead a wide proliferation of theories and practices concerning baptism. Were only adults to be baptized, or infants too? Were children to be baptized, and, if so, at what age? Was baptism to be performed after instruction and training, or was it enough for a baptismal candidate simply to confess belief in Jesus Christ? Was baptism to be performed by sprinkling, pouring, or full immersion, and by what authority? Did baptism have salvific value, or was it merely a public expression or token of admission into the community? Was the resultant purification brought about by God or by the convert's self-dedication? This is not the place to recapitulate the works of Ferguson and others who have explored in depth the variegated history of baptism. The point here is that Christianity wandered off in disarray in many direction and paths, but it did not need to have been that way. When the covenantal function of baptism is discarded, however, one must invent new answers to such questions as what is the purpose of baptism, and what does the ordinance of baptism mean or symbolize? The answers turn out to be wide ranging, precisely because everything is up for reinterpretation once the anchor is lost. As early as the second century, the covenantal core of the Christian ordinance of baptism had been set aside, along with other ordinances of priesthood ordination and marriage—as these would be understood through the lens of the Restoration—and had been replaced with the understanding of sacraments as blessings or infusions of grace in the recipient through the mediation of the priest, which consequently became standard in the Christian world.<sup>42</sup> While there is not space here for a review of their various arguments, we

can note a few interesting connections and contrasts with the Book of Mormon view. Instead of these ordinances facilitating the acts of covenanting by their participants, they came to be seen as blessings from God to the recipients—a fundamental transformation.

This trajectory in the evolution of the Eucharist provides a good case in point.<sup>43</sup> Encouraged by the synoptic Gospels, many scholars have seen the Last Supper as a Passover meal, with Jesus himself as the sacrificial lamb who would spill his blood to redeem Israel. In this vein, Solomon Zeitlin concluded that “the institution of the Eucharist is really based on the Jewish custom . . . of giving thanks to God on the first night of Passover for their redemption, over unleavened bread and a cup of wine.”<sup>44</sup> But seeing the Eucharist merely as thanksgiving ignores its essential connection to baptism and to the covenant. Yet one of the earliest Christian texts on the subject (*Didache* 9:1–5) presents the sacrament only as an act of thanksgiving for “the life and knowledge” that had been revealed through Jesus, but curiously it also stipulated that only the baptized could participate: “Let no one eat or drink of your thanksgiving [meal] save those who have been baptized in the name of the Lord, since the Lord has said concerning this, ‘Do not give what is holy to the dogs,’”<sup>45</sup> evidently reflecting some early but soon lost understanding of baptism as a covenantal entrance requirement into the Christian community that was connected with the eating of the Eucharist. Eventually, the full divergence between Eucharist and baptism was theologically completed, as is exemplified in a recent statement by Ben Witherington: he wrote that the Lord’s Supper is “something one must be able to actively partake of,” requiring conscious reflection or remembrance, but “baptism is a passive sacrament, something done for the individual.”<sup>46</sup>

A survey of reference works by Catholic and Protestant scholars shows that while they have tended to emphasize the baptismal symbolism of Romans 6, they also note other competing formulations that are thought to have influenced Christian understandings at different times and places. Many scholars have argued for a direct connection between Jewish purifications and washings and Christian baptisms; there is widespread acceptance of the idea that Christian baptism may derive from Jewish proselyte baptism, which H. H. Rowley has characterized as “not an act of ritual purification alone but an act of self-dedication to the God of Israel.”<sup>47</sup> Ferguson’s study of these long-standing claims, however, reexamines the evidence for and against these linkages in exhaustive detail and concludes that the repeated distinctions early Christians made between Jewish washings and Christian baptisms are well founded. While the Jewish washings were repeated endlessly to achieve ritual purity, the Christians saw themselves

following John and baptized the repentant for the remission of sins and to prepare a people to be ready to meet the returning Messiah.<sup>48</sup> Regarding Jewish proselyte baptisms, the evidence suggests this practice arose only after John and the Christians were baptizing. And “the heart of the rabbinic conversion ceremony was circumcision, not baptism. . . . Proselyte baptism was for Gentiles; Christians baptized Jews as well as Gentiles.”<sup>49</sup>

The idea that baptism was a washing or purification has also been connected with pagan practices. “There is abundant evidence that lustral bathing was an important aspect of Greco-Roman religions, especially related to healing divinities such as Asklepius,”<sup>50</sup> and some scholars have thought this may have influenced Christian teachings and practices, though this is not so widely accepted. But it is clear that by the third and fourth centuries, Christian writers taught that “the sacrament of baptism cleansed the recipient of sin—a benefit primarily conveyed by the liturgical action of immersion in water.”<sup>51</sup>

But then, in all of this, if the purpose of baptism was to remove sin, why then was a sinless Jesus baptized? This “awkward question” attracted the attention of Christian theologians from Justin Martyr in the late second century down to the fifth century, when it became a central issue for the “controversies surrounding the person and work of Jesus as Savior.”<sup>52</sup> In her new book on baptismal imagery, Robin Jensen documents a variety of theories that were advanced to patch this hole in the doctrine of baptism as a cleansing, none of which really solve the problem. Some of the principal proposals include Ignatius’s suggestion that Jesus’s baptism cleansed the water for others to follow, Justin Martyr’s assertion that the baptism of Jesus identified him publicly as the promised messiah, and Cyril’s teaching that the personal and physical descent of Jesus into the water began “the sanctification of all of human nature.”<sup>53</sup> Jensen goes on to list and describe a number of exotic ritual elements that accrued to Christian baptism during these early centuries that were designed to remove sin, to drive away evil, or to impart “health and strength to recipients.”<sup>54</sup> These included a number of preliminary acts such as “exorcism, offering salt to catechumens, blowing on them (exsufflation), and then a series of ascetical practices, . . . and a spoken renunciation of Satan.”<sup>55</sup> Because of the widespread belief in demons and demonic possession, “baptismal rites began with exorcism,” and by “the mid-fourth century, rituals of prebaptismal exorcism were practiced in most parts of the Christian world.”<sup>56</sup>

After surveying the myriad detailed accounts of baptismal ceremonies in the first five Christian centuries, Ferguson notes how a number of the ideas originally “associated with baptism became increasingly differentiated according to the accompanying ceremonies.”<sup>57</sup> None of the elaborations of

the baptismal ritual demonstrate this more dramatically than the renunciations of the devil. Various versions of this ceremony are documented in different times and places, and some vestiges persisted into modern times. The writings of John Chrysostom (d. AD 407) preserve a detailed account that helps us understand how the meanings associated with baptism were developed into a collection of elaborations of the baptismal ritual itself. After ritualized instruction, a dramatic exorcism was administered to the catechumens to free their souls from the captivity of the devil. Stripped and kneeling, they were then led by the priest in stating, "I renounce thee, Satan, thy pomps, thy service, and thy works." Once this was finished, the priest again had them say, "And I enter into thy service, O Christ." Chrysostom saw this as a ritual in which one terminated his contract with the devil and entered into a new contract with Christ.<sup>58</sup>

Ferguson also identifies a number of subsequent changes and developments in the early centuries of the Christian church in the practice and meaning of baptism. For example, because water was indispensable to baptism, baptism was naturally but incompletely seen as a cleansing. The original meaning of the very early practice of laying on hands following baptism has faded from view and has not found consensual explanation among scholars, who have interpreted it as a prayer of blessing, as a separate prayer for the imparting of the Holy Spirit, as a means of anointing with oil, or as some other thing or combination of these.<sup>59</sup> Clothing was often removed for the baptism and new clothing donned after the baptism as an elaboration of the symbolism of death and new birth. After the fourth century, white clothing was used as a symbol of purity for the person coming out of the water. The eventual abandonment of immersion and introduction of infant baptism were part of this evolution and stand as clear evidences of a loss of any essential understanding that may have been shared by the first generation of Christians.<sup>60</sup>

The accumulating baptismal practices were not seen as competing symbols, but rather were collected together in a variety of eclectic wholes as determined by the head cleric in different jurisdictions. So even though some of these practices seemed to preserve aspects of the core idea of baptism as a witness of a covenant, this was easily overshadowed by a panoply of other symbolic elements drawn principally from scripture. Some of these accretions may also have derived from the conflation of postbaptismal ordinances into the expanding ritual complex of baptism.

This eclectic character of Christian baptism was fully developed by the fourth century, as can be best observed in the baptismal service that was standard in Milan at the time when Augustine came there to be baptized under the administration of Bishop Ambrose.<sup>61</sup> Paul's connection of

baptism with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is suggested most prominently by the scheduling of all baptisms for one annual Easter-day service, and by the architecture of the small tower, dedicated to this single sacrament, that stood between the old and new basilicas. The octagonal shape of the building and of the font at its center was to remind people of the biblical seven-day creation account in which the unmentioned eighth day had come to be related to the eternity that follows and to Sunday, the day of Christ's resurrection (John 20:19). The building was also designed to look like a single-centered mausoleum of the time, emphasizing the death theme—but with a tower possibly suggesting resurrection and ascension. The following poem of eight elegiac distichs was inscribed on the tower's eight walls:

This eight-niched temple has risen to holy purpose,  
And eight sides of the font perform their task.

That number befits a chamber for baptizing,  
It towers so that people may be saved.

In the splendor of Christ's rising, to break the bars  
Of death and bring life out of tombs.

Freeing from sin's stain repenting men,  
Cleansed in the font's pure-running stream.

Here those shedding vile crimes of their past  
May wash their hearts and take away pure breasts.

Here let them swiftly come. Here anyone who dares,  
However darkened, will go off whiter than snow.

Let saints run here, since no one can be saintly  
Without these waters, by God's reign and plan.

Here flares the right. What can be more God's work  
Than removing sin in an eyeblink?<sup>62</sup>

This poem begins with allusions to Paul's metaphor of death and resurrection and then quickly focuses on the the removal of sins: "freeing from sin's stain," "shedding vile crimes," "wash their hearts," "whiter than snow," and "removing sin in an eye blink." Interestingly, none of these can be derived easily from New Testament language but fit more comfortably with the universally recognized symbolism of washing with water to remove spiritual impurities.

The actual ceremony, as described by Ambrose and others and summarized here by Garry Wills, demonstrates even further how much Ambrose's elaboration of the fourth-century Easter baptism incorporates an eclectic assembly of symbols.

Before dawn in 387, Augustine and his fellows gathered at the entrance to the baptistry, where Ambrose performed a ceremony of opening (Effetha) by touching their ears and nostrils, so they would have a heightened spiritual awareness of what they were about to see and do. Then, just inside the baptistry, they faced west and renounced the devil, before facing east and welcoming the coming of Christ into their hearts. After this, they stripped off their clothes in one of the buildings's recesses, before being anointed with oil all over their bodies "like athletes." Then they stepped down into the baptismal pool, escorted by the bishop and his deacon, who ducked each person's head under the water three times as they professed belief in each member of the Trinity. As they came out of the pool, they were wrapped in a white garment signifying their innocence. They were anointed again, though this time only on the head. After that, the bishop washed their feet—a last gesture of exorcism, since the serpent in Eden had bitten Adam in the foot—then they received a "seal of the Spirit" and went to the New Basilica. For the first time, they heard the Lord's Prayer and participated in the Eucharist.<sup>63</sup>

Clearly, by Ambrose's time, the baptismal ritual had evolved far beyond the New Testament model provided by John the Baptist and Jesus Christ in the river Jordan—both in form and function. The various historians who have collected and analyzed the wide variety of developments in Christian baptism during these early centuries generally recognize that the elaborations of the simple New Testament ritual seemed to evolve to provide a more concrete meaning for baptism than could be derived directly from the text itself.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Book of Mormon prophets shared a clear and distinctive symbolism in their discourse on baptism, one which they derived directly from the words of Christ to them on various occasions. They nowhere define baptism as a washing away of sins. Baptism is inseparably connected to repentance, as water baptism is required as a witness to the Father that one has repented, has taken the name of Christ upon him, and has covenanted to endure to the end in obedience to his commandments. Baptism is the act that God has designated as a required and deliberate external sign of an internal changing of one's life—all in response to the invitation to come unto Christ: to trust in him, to turn back to God by repenting of one's sins, and to be baptized. The repentant convert submits himself to baptism. It is the required act and witness of what he has done to qualify for the promised remission of sins. Recognition of the necessary volition of the subject makes the dialogic character of the gospel process evident. There is an explicit covenant of repentance and future obedience witnessed in the baptismal ordinance. Jesus sought baptism because, even though sinless, he also needed

to humble himself before the Father and make that covenant and witness it publicly—to fulfill all righteousness. The sacrament or Eucharist is an explicit renewal of the same witness of the covenant represented in baptism. The remission of sins comes through the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, whom the Father sends in fulfillment of his promise to the individual who has repented in full sincerity. In this experience, the recipient is purged and forgiven of his prior sins and receives the powerful witness of one member of the Godhead of the reality of the other two—and this is a sampling or earnest down payment<sup>64</sup> of the fullness that awaits those who then faithfully endure to the end and enter into their presence in eternal life.

Bits and pieces of this understanding can be found in early Christian practices and theology, though they are never brought together with this kind of clarity or authority. The Book of Mormon approach strongly endorses and even provides an otherwise missing explanation for the persistent ideas of signs and covenants associated with baptism in the Christian tradition. Book of Mormon authors did not see baptism as an infusion of grace from God but rather as a convert's witness to God of a covenant or promise made during the process of repentance that he would always obey Christ, that he would take the name of Christ upon himself, and that he would always remember Christ.<sup>65</sup>

As a final reflection, the Book of Mormon characterization of baptism as a covenant fits well with the best current thinking of philosophers, anthropologists, and others regarding the purpose and function of religious rituals generally. Louis Dupré's analysis is the classic work on this topic. He sees rites as "first among religious symbols." They symbolize important life occasions but do not recapitulate them. While the occasion symbolized may have been intensely emotional, the ritual is not. The ritual action does not repeat the action or event it symbolizes but rather bestows "meaning upon it by placing it in a higher perspective."<sup>66</sup> By dramatizing critical life moments, rituals "bring structure into life as a whole," relating the past and present to the future.<sup>67</sup> This would seem to be an apt description of the Book of Mormon baptismal ritual, which symbolizes an earlier event of personal repentance and covenanting and is projected into the future through the witnessing act of baptism, providing foundational meaning for the convert's future. This baptismal teaching reflects a fundamental feature of religious rituals in that it gives "the private events of life a public character." Baptism is understood as a public witnessing that creates a community, making the repentant "aware of their essential togetherness." The ritual thus constitutes "the cement of social life."<sup>68</sup> I have speculated that this understanding of baptism might also be correlated with ancient Israelite covenant practices to provide promising explanations for the requirements

of immersion and of sacramental ingestion of the bread and wine/water. While it is attractive to have a shared conceptualization of covenant practices in ancient Israel and in Christianity, this suggestion is only a hypothesis that calls for further research at this point in time.

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1. Richard L. Anderson, "Religious Validity: The Sacrament Covenant in Third Nephi," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, vol. 2, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 12; Craig J. Ostler, "Baptism," in *The Book of Mormon and the Message of the Four Gospels*, ed. Ray L. Huntington and Terry B. Ball (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2001), 144.

2. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets," *BYU Studies*, 31, no. 3 (1991): 31–50; and Noel B. Reynolds, "The True Points of My Doctrine," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 2 (1996): 26–56.

3. For more discussions of covenants in the Book of Mormon, see Thomas R. Valletta, "The Captain and the Covenant," in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1992), 223–48; Kenneth W. Anderson, "What Parents Should Teach Their Children from the Book of Mosiah," in *The Book of Mormon: Mosiah, Salvation Only through Christ*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1991), 31–33; Jennifer Clark Lane, "The Lord Will Redeem His People: Adoptive Covenant and Redemption in the Old Testament and Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 2 (1993): 39–62; Victor Ludlow, "Covenant Teachings of the Book of Mormon," in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard L. Anderson* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000), 67–93; Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 102–3.

4. On Book of Mormon teachings about the importance of being truly converted before baptism, see H. Donl Peterson, "Church Discipline in the Book of Mosiah," in Nyman and Tate, *Book of Mormon: Mosiah*, 213–14.

5. Wilford Woodruff, "Sabbath Scene in Nauvoo," *Times and Seasons* 3 (March 20, 1842): 751–52; Joseph Smith Jr., *The History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 4:554–55 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*).

6. See the more detailed discussion of the Book of Mormon prophets' understanding of repentance in Reynolds, "True Points of My Doctrine," 33–42. For

Christ's teachings on repentance in 3 Nephi, see Mae Blanch, "Repentance: The Gift of Love," in *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9–30, This Is My Gospel*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1993), 73–87.

7. Reynolds, "True Points of My Doctrine," 35; see also D. Todd Christofferson, in "The Divine Gift of Repentance," *Ensign* 41 (November 2011): 40.

8. John W. Welch has shown that the basic elements of Moroni's sacrament prayers reflect the same covenant elements outlined for the Nephites by King Benjamin (Mosiah 5:1–4) and by Jesus (3 Ne. 17–25). "From Presence to Practice: Jesus, the Sacrament Prayers, the Priesthood, and Church Discipline in 3 Nephi 18 and Moroni 2–6," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996): 119–39. Joseph Fielding McConkie discusses being "filled" by the sacrament in "The Doctrine of a Covenant People," in Nyman and Tate, *Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9–30*, 172–74. See also Monte S. Nyman, "The Sacrament: Building upon Christ's Rock," in Huntington and Ball, *Book of Mormon and the Message of the Four Gospels*, 125–37.

9. See the detailed development of this topic in Reynolds, "Gospel of Jesus Christ," 31–50.

10. See Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 208–9, 218–35, 239, for an account of the dialogic character of personal revelation as described by Book of Mormon prophets.

11. Benjamin teaches this principle (Mosiah 3:18), and Mormon expounds on the issue. Mormon teaches that "little children . . . are not capable of committing sin" and "cannot repent" (Moro. 8: 8, 19), so there is no need for baptism, which is a witness of repentance.

12. Many more passages command men and women to participate in this dialogic process: 2 Nephi 26:25; 28:32; Alma 5:34–35; 3 Nephi 9:14; 12:3, 19–20, 23–24; 18:32; 21:6, 20, 27; 27:20; Mormon 3:2; Ether 4:13–14, 18; 12:27; Moroni 7:34.

13. On the baptism of water and baptism of fire as taught in the Book of Mormon, see Larry E. Dahl, "The Doctrine of Christ: 2 Nephi 31–32," in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, the Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989), 361–68.

14. On the role of faith in this repentance and change of heart as taught in the Book of Mormon, see Brent L. Top, "Faith unto Repentance," in *A Book of Mormon Treasury: Gospel Insights from General Authorities and Religious Educators* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2003), 295–315.

15. Reynolds, "Gospel of Jesus Christ," 43–47.

16. Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009). This work, a comprehensive study of early Christian sources, will be very useful for updating and expanding LDS scholarship on baptism and other Restoration practices. See my review of the book in *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (2012): 187–90. Other recent studies are less comprehensive and offer alternate interpretations for some of the evidence. See Bryan D. Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From the New Testament to the Council of Trent* (London: Ashgate, 2006); and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, rev. and expanded ed. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2007). A new and interesting approach featuring Christian art is Robin M. Jensen,

*Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity: Ritual, Visual, and Theological Dimensions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2012). I thank the publisher for access to a republication version of this work.

17. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 83.

18. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 25–82, esp. 38.

19. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 83 n. 2, referencing Albrecht Oepke, “βάπτω, βαπτίζω (et al.),” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, tr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:545.

20. See Mosiah 26:22; Alma 5:62; 6:2; 7:14; 9:27; 48:19; 49:30; Helaman 3:24; 5:17–19; 3 Nephi 1:23; 7:26.

21. See the pair of articles by B. E. Thiering, “Inner and Outer Cleansing at Qumran as a Background to New Testament Baptism,” *New Testament Studies* 26, no. 2 (January 1980): 266–77; and “Qumran Initiation and New Testament Baptism,” *New Testament Studies* 27, no. 5 (October 1981): 615–31.

22. See, for example, Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1962), 3:200; Leslie F. Church, ed., *Commentary on the Whole Bible by Matthew Henry* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1960), 163; *Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, n.d.), 1:290; Marcus Dods and others, *An Exposition of the Bible* (Hartford, Conn.: Scranton, 1904), 4:70.

23. See the references in note 20, as well as Moroni 8:11: “Baptism is unto repentance to the fulfilling of the commandments unto the remission of sins.”

24. Compare Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3 with Matthew 3:11, 16; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; and Acts 1:5; 11:16.

25. Compare Matt. 26:28.

26. *History of the Church*, 5:499. On infant baptism as taught in the Book of Mormon, see Robert L. Millett, “The Mission of Jesus Christ—Ether 3 and 4,” in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi through Moroni, from Zion to Destruction*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1995), 19–29; and the review of that book by Bryan J. Thomas in *FARMS Review* 8, no. 1 (1996), 27–50.

27. Ben Witherington III, *Troubled Waters: The Real New Testament Theology of Baptism* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2007), 110.

28. François Bovon, “Baptism in the Ancient Church,” *Sewanee Theological Review* 42 (1999): 429–38, an English translation of his 1973 French original. This fits easily with a long line of pious Bible commentaries, for example, Joseph Benson, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 5 vols. (London: n.p., 1811–18), who understood John to be enjoining penitent persons to be baptized “as a testimony, on their part, of the sincerity of their repentance” or to be witnessing that they had received the forgiveness of sins, and so forth.

29. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 192.

30. Ferguson, Bovon, and Witherington all agree with the careful philological analysis of 1 Peter 3:18–22 published in John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 637, 678–81.

31. J. D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London, SCM Press, 1970), 219.

32. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 854.

33. In the following discussion, I rely principally on Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), which I find to be one of the most helpful presentations of this ancient material.

34. See the full etymological discussion in Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 47–48.

35. Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (rpt., Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 194. While Thomas Valletta draws a parallel between the Jaredites being “buried in the depths of the sea” and the baptismal covenant’s symbolism of death and rebirth, the comparison of death to baptism is not implied in the account in Ether 6. Thomas Valletta, “Jared and His Brother,” in Nyman and Tate, *Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi through Moroni*, 303–22.

36. Hillers, *History of a Biblical Idea*, 40. John Tvedtnes suggests that “eating Christ’s flesh symbolically gives us his qualities,” just as in various cultures people eat certain animals to gain a characteristic of that animal. John A. Tvedtnes, “Olive Oil: Symbol of the Holy Ghost,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 442.

37. See 3 Nephi 18:1–12, 28–29; and 20:3–9.

38. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 240.

39. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 188–89.

40. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 195.

41. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 194–96.

42. See Noel B. Reynolds, “The Decline of Covenant in Early Christian Thought,” in *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2005), 295–324, for an explanation of how the covenant-based ordinances of early Christianity were transformed into blessings or sacraments featuring the reception of God’s grace.

43. A helpful recent survey of these arguments can be found in Paul F. Bradshaw, “The Evolution of Eucharistic Rites,” *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 118–43.

44. Solomon Zeitlin, “The Liturgy of the First Night of Passover,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 38, no. 4 (April 1948): 449. Zeitlin reminds us that the Passover lamb was to be completely consumed, which may well be related to the Christian partaking of bread in memory of the body of Christ. I will not pursue these issues in this paper.

45. Kurt Miederwimmer, *The Didache: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 144; see also Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003), 23.

46. Ben Witherington III, *Making a Meal of It: Rethinking the Theology of the Lord’s Supper* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2007), 135.

47. W. F. Flemington, “Baptism,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1962), 1:348–50.

48. See, for example, Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 82–85, 91–94, 112, 266–67, and 438–39.

49. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 82.

50. Daniel N. Schowalter, “Baptism,” *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 73.

51. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity*, 13.

52. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity*, 13.

53. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity*, 10–13.

54. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity*, 30.

55. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity*, 31.

56. Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity*, 31, 32.

57. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 524.

58. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 537–39, citing Chrysostom, *Homilies on Colossians* 6.4. See the more detailed reportage in Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity*, 37–38. For Chrysostom’s full *Baptismal Homily 2* in English translation, see Thomas M. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate: West and East Syria*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2007), 70–81.

59. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 854–56.

60. Ferguson indicates that “the literary sources that have constituted the majority of the present study, when they describe the baptismal action, uniformly describe an immersion or imply it as the norm.” Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 850. He devotes all of chapter 23 to the late emergence of infant baptism and the controversies that it generated. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 362–79.

61. Thanks to historian Garry Wills, we now have an integrated account of Augustine’s baptism reconstructed from surviving writings of Ambrose and from the archaeological excavations of the famous fourth-century baptistery in Milan. See Garry Wills, *Font of Life: Ambrose, Augustine, and the Mystery of Baptism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). The following summary is drawn from Wills’s book. Translations from Latin texts are also by Professor Wills.

62. Wills, *Font of Life*, 12–13.

63. Wills, *Font of Life*, 8. For Wills’s much more detailed reconstruction of this ceremony, see his chapter 7, “Augustine at the Font,” 105–22.

64. See Ephesians 1:13–14: “after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption.” See also 2 Corinthians 1:22: “Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”

65. This same understanding seems to inform the statement on baptism in the revelation given at the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1830: “All those who humble themselves before God, and desire to be baptized, and come forth with broken hearts and contrite spirits, and *witness before the church* that they have truly repented of all their sins, and are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end, and truly manifest by their works that they have received of the Spirit of Christ unto the remission of their sins, shall be received by baptism into his church” (D&C 20:37, emphasis added).

66. Louis Dupré, *Symbols of the Sacred* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 12–13. Dupré’s core text was published first in 1972.

67. Dupré, *Symbols of the Sacred*, 17–18.

68. Dupré, *Symbols of the Sacred*, 18–19.