



Type: Journal Article

What's in a Name? Playing in the Onomastic Sandbox

Author(s): Kevin L. Barney

Source: *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, Volume 29 (2018),
pp. 251-272

Published by: The Interpreter Foundation

Abstract: *Name as Key-Word* brings together a collection of essays, many of them previously published, whose consistent theme is exploring examples of onomastic wordplay or puns in Mormon scripture in general and the Book of Mormon in particular. Without a knowledge of the meaning of these names, the punning in the scriptural accounts would not be recognized by modern English readers. Exploring the (probable) meanings of these names helps to open our eyes to how the scriptural authors used punning and other forms of wordplay to convey their messages in a memorable way.

Review of Matthew L. Bowen, *Name as Key-Word: Collected Essays on Onomastic Wordplay and the Temple in Mormon Scripture* (Salt Lake City: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2018). 408 pp., \$24.95.

INTERPRETER

— § —
A JOURNAL OF MORMON SCRIPTURE

Volume 29 · 2018 · Pages 251 - 272

What's in a Name? Playing in the Onomastic Sandbox

Kevin L. Barney

Offprint Series

© 2018 The Interpreter Foundation. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

ISSN 2372-1227 (print)
ISSN 2372-126X (online)

The goal of The Interpreter Foundation is to increase understanding of scripture through careful scholarly investigation and analysis of the insights provided by a wide range of ancillary disciplines, including language, history, archaeology, literature, culture, ethnohistory, art, geography, law, politics, philosophy, etc. Interpreter will also publish articles advocating the authenticity and historicity of LDS scripture and the Restoration, along with scholarly responses to critics of the LDS faith. We hope to illuminate, by study and faith, the eternal spiritual message of the scriptures—that Jesus is the Christ.

Although the Board fully supports the goals and teachings of the Church, The Interpreter Foundation is an independent entity and is neither owned, controlled by nor affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or with Brigham Young University. All research and opinions provided are the sole responsibility of their respective authors, and should not be interpreted as the opinions of the Board, nor as official statements of LDS doctrine, belief or practice.

This journal is a weekly publication of the Interpreter Foundation, a non-profit organization located at InterpreterFoundation.org. You can find other articles published in our journal at MormonInterpreter.com. You may subscribe to this journal at MormonInterpreter.com/annual-print-subscription.

WHAT'S IN A NAME? PLAYING IN THE ONOMASTIC SANDBOX

Kevin L. Barney

Abstract: *Name as Key-Word brings together a collection of essays, many of them previously published, whose consistent theme is exploring examples of onomastic wordplay or puns in Mormon scripture in general and the Book of Mormon in particular. Without a knowledge of the meaning of these names, the punning in the scriptural accounts would not be recognized by modern English readers. Exploring the (probable) meanings of these names helps to open our eyes to how the scriptural authors used punning and other forms of wordplay to convey their messages in a memorable way.*

Review of Matthew L. Bowen, *Name as Key-Word: Collected Essays on Onomastic Wordplay and the Temple in Mormon Scripture* (Salt Lake City: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2018). 408 pp., \$24.95.

Matthew L. Bowen, an Assistant Professor of Religious Education at BYU-Hawaii, who received his PhD in biblical studies from Catholic University of America, has for some time now been publishing short studies that explore onomastic wordplay in Mormon scripture. Many of these essays have been previously published, often in the pages of *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*.¹ The adjective *onomastic*

1. Matthew L. Bowen, "'This Son Shall Comfort Us': An Onomastic Tale of Two Noahs," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 23 (2017): 263-98; Bowen, "'See That Ye Are Not Lifted Up': The Name Zoram and Its Paronomastic Pejoration," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 19 (2016): 109-143; Bowen, "Onomastic Wordplay on Joseph and Benjamin and Gezera Shawa in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 255-73; Bowen, "'Most Desirable Above All Things': Onomastic Play on Mary and Mormon in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 13 (2015): 27-61; Bowen, "'And There Wrestled a Man with Him' (Genesis 32:24): Enos's Adaptations

derives from the Greek *onomastikos* “of or relating to names or naming” (from Greek *onoma* “name”).²

Bowen’s work on proper names in scriptural texts unavoidably brushes up against knotty issues in Book of Mormon translation theory (such as loose v. tight control, the extent of linguistic evolution over a 1,000-year period, creolization with other languages, the whole concept of “inspired” translation, what the “learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians” from 1 Nephi 1:2 is supposed to mean, and so forth). Two methodological notes (at pages xlvi-xlix and 18-19) make clear that he is thoroughly familiar with these issues, but if we had to solve them first before commenting meaningfully on Book of Mormon language, we would never get anywhere, so he essentially brackets such issues and takes 1 Nephi 1:2 as warrant for treating Hebrew and Egyptian as relevant languages for the Book of Mormon text, which strikes me as a fair way to proceed. (Some of these theoretical issues concerning Book of Mormon translation are also touched on briefly by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, a moving force behind the publication of this volume, in a six-page foreword [ix-xv].)³

Here I will critique and comment on the first essay in the volume. I have also included an appendix written by Bowen himself and included in the book, which provides complete summaries of all 16 chapters.

ON “NEPHI’S GOOD INCLUSIO”

Chapter 1, titled “Nephi’s Good Inclusio,” essentially posits that (1) the name *Nephi* means “good”; (2) Nephi plays on the meaning of his own name when he refers to the goodness of his own parents or the goodness of God; and (3) such wordplay occurs both at the beginning and at the end of his corpus, thus forming a rhetorical framing device called an *inclusio*. The three words in his title for this chapter correspond to the three propositions he makes. I will comment on these propositions in order.

of the Onomastic Wordplay of Genesis”, *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 10 (2014): 151-60.

2. The noun *onomasticon*, which derives from the neuter form of the Greek adjective *onomastikos*, refers to a learned work that explores the derivation and semantic fields of the proper names (both personal and place) occurring in a given book or literature. Of particular relevance for the volume under review is the *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, last modified March 8, 2017, <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu>.

3. The foreword features 75 endnotes, surely some sort of record!

Nephi

For the suggested wordplay to be meaningful, we must posit that the name *Nephi* meant “good” (and that Nephi knew this). There have been various suggestions for the etymology of Nephi, but the *Book of Mormon Onomasticon* opines that the “most likely” derivation of the name Nephi is ancient Egyptian *nfr* “good, beautiful.”⁴ At first blush this seems unlikely, since the final *r* is not represented in Nephi, but that is not actually a difficulty, since the final *r* can elide.⁵ Bowen explains that during and after Lehi’s time the word would have been pronounced something like *neh-fee*, *nay-fee* or *nou-fee*. The word came into Coptic as *noufi* (in northern dialects) or *noufe* (in southern dialects). I remember reading John Gee’s treatment of this name in 1992 and in subsequent work, and it struck me as persuasive. So if the name *Nephi* is of ancient origin, I think Bowen is justified in considering it as deriving from the Egyptian *nfr*.

Good

Nephi opens his record with these words:

I, NEPHI, having been born of **goodly** parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of **the goodness** and the mysteries **of God**, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days. (1 Nephi 1:1, emphasis added)

So Nephi begins by reciting his own name, which means “good,” and then plays on that meaning in referring to the goodness of his parents and the goodness of God. (This verse is the opening frame of the posited inclusio, discussed further below.)

A significant issue arises whether the *goodly* in “goodly parents” actually means “good” or something else. Over the past decade and

4. See *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, s.v. “Nephi,” last modified November 10, 2017, <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/NEPHI>; citing John Gee, “A Note on the Name Nephi,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 189-91; John Gee, “Four Suggestions on the Origin of the Name Nephi,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch, and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 15.

5. William F. Edgerton, “Stress, Vowel Quality, and Syllable Division in Egyptian,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 6, no. 1 (1947): 10-17.

earlier, this has become an important and contested point, and I would like to devote some discussion to this question.

The traditional reading of this passage is that *goodly* = good (perhaps with the connotation *righteous*). One way to demonstrate this is by consulting translations of the English Book of Mormon into other languages, in which a word for *good* is generally used, such as Spanish *buenos*.

Some time ago another theory for how to take the word *goodly* in this passage arose, of which I first learned from the late Marc Schindler. The basic idea was to take *goodly* in the sense of “possessed of goods,” thus meaning “wealthy, affluent.” Nephi was able to receive an education, an expensive proposition, because his parents were affluent and could afford such.⁶ I thought it was an intriguing idea, and *goodly* seemed like it might bear such a meaning in Jacobean patter, but I took an agnostic stance on the suggestion until I could look into it further.

Six years ago I decided to take a crack at this issue.⁷ The first thing I did was actually look up *goodly* in the dictionary, and I was surprised to learn that it does not actually mean “good,” according to lexical sources. The dictionary I keep in my office has “1. Pleasantly attractive; 2. Significantly large: CONSIDERABLE (a [goodly] number).”⁸ The 1828 Webster’s, often consulted because of its proximity to the production of the Book of Mormon, had the following:⁹

Being of a handsome form; beautiful; graceful; as a *goodly* person; *goodly* raiment; *goodly* houses.

1. Pleasant; agreeable; desirable; as *goodly* days.
2. Bulky; swelling; affectedly turgid.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* had the following:¹⁰

6. The idea appears to have originated with a suggestion made by Hugh Nibley that *goodly* here actually meant “wealthy” or “of elevated social status.” See Grant Hardy, “Approaching Completion: The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2018): 164, citing Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, 2d ed., 6 parts (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies; Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 1:55.

7. See Kevin Barney, “‘Goodly Parents’ Revisited,” *By Common Consent* (blog), January 1, 2012, <https://bycommonconsent.com/2012/01/01/goodly-parents-revisited/>.

8. *Webster’s Ninth Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster Inc., 1987), s.v. “goodly.”

9. *Webster’s Dictionary 1828 – Online Edition*, s.v. “goodly,” accessed April 30, 2018, <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/goodly>.

10. *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), s.v. “goodly”.

1. Of good appearance, good looking; well favoured or proportioned; comely, fair, handsome.
2. Notable or considerable in respect of size, quantity, or number (frequently with mixture of sense 1).
3. Of good quality, admirable, splendid, excellent. Also, well suited for some purpose, proper, convenient (often with implication of sense 1).
4. Gracious, kind, kindly disposed.

So I quickly saw that I faced a dilemma. Did *goodly* in 1 Nephi 1:1 mean “good” per the traditional LDS reading, did it mean “attractive” per the lexical meaning, or did it mean “wealthy” per the revisionist reading?

Ultimately, context trumps the dictionary. The word *therefore* in the Book of Mormon text requires a causal relationship between Nephi’s parents being “goodly” and Nephi’s being taught somewhat in all the learning of his father. Since Lehi and Sariah as pleasantly attractive would have nothing to do with Nephi’s being so taught, the primary lexical meaning of the word simply does not work in our passage, which would seem to leave us where we started: with a choice between the traditional “good” and the revisionist “wealthy.”

I decided the best way to gain some insight into this question would be to examine the usage of the word *goodly* in our scriptural canon. The word appears 38 other times in our scriptures (29 times in the KJV Old Testament, four in the KJV New Testament, four in the Doctrine and Covenants, and one other time in the Book of Mormon). I thought the usage in the KJV would be especially probative because there we could check the underlying Hebrew and Greek words to determine the intended shade of meaning. The results of my inquiry are set forth below:

1. Genesis 27:15. And Rebekah took goodly raiment. Hebrew *chemdah*, that which is desired, pleasant, excellent.
2. Genesis 39:6. Joseph was [a] goodly [person], and well favoured. Hebrew *toar*, beautiful (in form).
3. Genesis 49:21. he giveth goodly words. Hebrew *shepher*, beauty, elegance (of words).
4. Exodus 2:2. she saw him that he [was a] goodly [child]. Hebrew *tob*, good (in various senses: fair, beautiful).
5. Exodus 39:28. goodly bonnets. Hebrew *p̄er*, an ornament, tiara, turban.

6. Leviticus 23:40. the boughs of goodly trees. Hebrew *hadar*, ornament (i.e., “ornamental trees”).
7. Numbers 24:5. How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob. Hebrew *tob*, good in various senses (beautiful, pleasant).
8. Numbers 31:10. all their goodly castles. Hebrew *tirah*, a fortress, enclosure.
9. Deuteronomy 3:25. that goodly mountain. Hebrew *tob*, good in various senses.
10. Deuteronomy 6:10. to give thee great and goodly cities. Hebrew *tob*, good in various senses.
11. Deuteronomy 8:12. hast built goodly houses. Hebrew *tob*, good in various senses.
12. Joshua 7:21. a goodly Babylonish garment. Hebrew *tob*, good in various senses (fair, beautiful).
13. 1 Samuel 9:2. Saul, a choice young man and a goodly. Hebrew *tob*, good in various senses.
14. 1 Samuel 16:12. of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. Hebrew *tob*, good in various senses.
15. 2 Samuel 23:21. an Egyptian, a goodly man. Hebrew *mar'eh*, form, appearance.
16. 1 Kings 1:6. and he also [was a] very goodly man. Hebrew *tob*, good in various senses.
17. 2 Chronicles 6:10. with the goodly vessels. Hebrew *chemdah*, that which is desired, pleasant.
18. 2 Chronicles 6:19. all the goodly vessels. Hebrew *machmad*, object of desire, grace, beauty, something precious.
19. Job 39:13. gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks. Hebrew *nenanim*, meaning uncertain (something having to do with the sound of the wings).
20. Psalms 16:6. I have a goodly heritage. Hebrew *shaphar*, pleasing.
21. Psalms 80:10. the goodly cedars. Hebrew *'el*, mighty (lit. godlike).
22. Jeremiah 3:19. a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations. Hebrew *tsebi*, splendor, glory (i.e., beautiful).

23. Jeremiah 11:16. a green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit. Hebrew *tuar*, a beautiful form, i.e., beautiful.
24. Ezekiel 17:8. that it might be a goodly vine. Hebrew ‘*addereth*, wide, ample, thus magnificent, splendid.
25. Ezekiel 17:23. and be a goodly cedar. Hebrew ‘*addir*, large, great, mighty, powerful, magnificent.
26. Hosea 10:1. they have made goodly images. Hebrew *tob*, good in various senses.
27. Joel 3:5. my goodly pleasant things. Hebrew *tob*, good in various senses.
28. Zechariah 10:3. as his goodly horse in the battle. Hebrew *hod*, splendor, freshness, beauty, and thus majestic.
29. Zechariah 11:13. a goodly price that I was prised as of them. Hebrew ‘*eder*, magnificence, thus “magnificence of price” (said ironically).
30. Matthew 13:45. goodly pearls. GR *kalos*, beautiful, pleasing in form.
31. Luke 21:5. adorned with goodly stones. GR *kalos*, beautiful, pleasing in form.
32. James 2:2. goodly apparel. GR *lampros*, shining, brilliant, and thus splendid, magnificent.
33. Revelation 18:14. all things which were dainty and goodly. GR *lampros*, shining, brilliant, and thus splendid, magnificent.
34. Mosiah 18:7. there were a goodly number gathered together at the place of Mormon.
35. Doctrine and Covenants 99:7. thou mayest go up also to the goodly land, to possess thine inheritance. [Note that in Hebrew, *tob* when used of land has the connotation “fertile.”]
36. Doctrine and Covenants 97:9. planted in a goodly land, by a pure stream. [Note that in Hebrew, *tob* when used of land has the connotation “fertile.”]
37. Doctrine and Covenants 103:20. possess the goodly land. [Note that in Hebrew, *tob* when used of land, has the connotation “fertile.”]

38. Doctrine and Covenants 103:24. to drive you from my goodly land. [Note that in Hebrew, *tob*, when used of land, has the connotation “fertile.”]

The other Book of Mormon occurrence, Mosiah 18:7, “there was a goodly number gathered together at the place of Mormon,” is an attested lexical usage and means “there was a *considerable* number gathered together at the place of Mormon.” The four Doctrine and Covenants occurrences all reflect a particular idiom connecting goodly with land, where “goodly land” means “*fertile* land.” The four New Testament occurrences are clearly within the lexical range of meaning, two a translation of Greek *kalos* “beautiful,”¹¹ and two a translation of Greek *lampros* “shining.”

The Old Testament usage of the word *goodly*, which is by far the most extensive in the scriptures, reflects substantial diversity in the underlying Hebrew. Of the 29 occurrences, 18 different Hebrew words are translated with English *goodly*, many with various nuances of the lexical meaning. The other 11 occurrences of *goodly* in the KJV Old Testament are all renderings of the Hebrew word *tob*, which fundamentally means “good” (with various shades of meaning). The English translational tradition sometimes renders these occurrences simply with “good,” other times with English words that would better fit the lexical meanings of English *goodly*, such as “fine” and the like.

Nowhere in the KJV Bible is the word *goodly* used in the sense of “wealthy.” In fact, I am unaware of any example in the English language where “goodly” is used to mean “wealthy,” which is why that meaning is not so catalogued in lexical sources.

In the comments to my blog post on this subject, someone pointed out that Joseph used this same expression in his 1832 history:

I was born in the town of Charon [Sharon] in the <State> of Vermont North America on the twenty third day of December AD 1805 of goodly Parents who spared no pains to instruct<ing> me in <the> christian religion[.]¹²

Goodly here cannot bear the meaning “wealthy,” a term surely never applied to his own parents. If it meant “wealthy” in 1 Nephi 1:1,

11. Compare the Greek expression *kalos kagathos*, “beautiful and good,” an expression that reflected the virtuous ideal of the aristocracy.

12. Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whitaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers: Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2012), 11, as quoted in Bowen, 11n6.

Joseph misunderstood the word when he used it here. I think the more parsimonious reading is that in Joseph’s usage *goodly* simply meant “good.” I suspect he used *goodly* rather than simply *good* to give the word a bit of an archaic flavor.¹³

Accordingly, I concur with the conclusion of Bowen as expressed at the end of a lengthy note on the issue that “the idea that ‘goodly parents’ means ‘wealthy parents’ cannot be sustained.”¹⁴

Note: After I had written the above, the most recent edition of *BYU Studies Quarterly* appeared in my mailbox, which includes an article by Grant Hardy, “Approaching Completion: The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project,”¹⁵ which includes a paragraph relevant to this question. Grant Hardy had written a letter to Royal Skousen in which he wondered whether Nephi’s self-description as one who had been “born of goodly parents” might be a mistake for “born of godly parents.” Hardy describes Skousen’s analysis of his suggestion:

On the one hand, “goodly” does not exactly mean “good” ... and a search of *Early English Books Online* yields no instances of “goodly parents,” but 1,185 occurrences of “godly parents,” including forty passages with “born of godly parents,” some of which date back to the seventeenth century. On the other hand, *goodly* more or less works (Skousen states that “the *Oxford English Dictionary* provides evidence that one archaic meaning for goodly was, in fact, “good”), and there are no

13. In some measure, I anticipated Bowen’s argument about the threefold use of *good* in 1 Nephi 1:1. “I can certainly see the need for money for a scribal type of education. But is that what the text is alluding to, I wonder, when it says that Nephi was taught somewhat in all the learning *of his father*? Unless Lehi were a scribe, that doesn’t seem to be the particular point Nephi is making here, even if it is otherwise true.

Two further points:

1. Later in the verse, Nephi refers to the goodness of God. I wonder if that might be a verbal echo of *goodly*?
2. Some scholars have suggested that Nephi’s name is derived from Egyptian *nfr*, which means “good” and that perhaps there is a wordplay on his name involved in the use of *goodly* here.” (Barney, January 1, 2012, comment on Barney, “‘Goodly Parents’ Revisited.”)

14. Bowen, 12n6.

15. Grant Hardy, “Approaching Completion: The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2018): 159-79.

examples of scribes ever mixing up *god* and *good*, so in the end he rejects the proposed emendation.¹⁶

Hardy notes that he agrees with Skousen’s final judgment and observes that “the OED (which is ultimately more useful than Webster) never actually offers ‘good’ as a definition for *goodly*, but it does list ‘virtuous,’ ‘excellent,’ and ‘fine’ as archaic usages, so good enough.” Of the Nibley proposal that *goodly* = wealthy, Hardy comments as follows:

Since these definitions appear idiosyncratic to Nibley, with no precedents in the English language listed in the OED, I would rule them out of bounds. And I would similarly disagree with Skousen’s insistence that the education provided to Nephi by his “goodly parents” was secular rather than religious (the latter would better fit precedents for “godly parents”), since that distinction strikes me as anachronistic with regard to ancient literacy, especially when the only text Nephi ever cites is the brass plates, whose Egyptian script (Mosiah 1:4) he could read thanks to “the learning of [his] father,” which included “the language of the Egyptians.” (1 Nephi 1:1-2)¹⁷

Hardy’s discussion simply cements in my mind the conclusion I had already reached, that in 1 Nephi 1:1 *goodly* simply means “good.”

Inclusio

An *inclusio*¹⁸ is a type of distant parallelism between material at the beginning of a section of text and that at the end of the section, thus framing or bracketing the material in the middle. For example, in an article on Mother in Heaven I identified an *inclusio* in Proverbs 3:13-18, which happened to be chiasmic in nature:

- A. happy [v. 13; *‘ashre*]
- B. Wisdom [v. 13; *chokmah*]
- [Framed material in verses 14 through 17]
- B. a tree of life [v. 18; *‘ets chayyim*]
- A. happy [v. 18; *me’ushshar* (same root as *‘ashre*)]

16. Ibid., 164.

17. Ibid., 164-65.

18. The word *inclusio* is the Latin nominative form of the word; our English derivative *inclusion* comes from the accusative form *inclusionem*.

The word *happy* was often used to allude to the Goddess Asherah due to similarity of sound (especially during times in Israelite history unfavorable to the goddess). Lady Wisdom was one of the ways Asherah was reconceptualized over time, and the tree of life alludes to her worship.¹⁹

One question I had when reading Bowen’s argument was whether or not *inclusio* occurred at such distances as he posited (i.e., the whole of 1 and 2 Nephi). Turning to that fountain of all human knowledge, Wikipedia (s.v. “Inclusio”),²⁰ the section on Hebrew Bible focused on several distant examples in the writings of Jeremiah, Lehi’s contemporary. For instance, consider this distant *inclusio* between chapters 1 and 24, which also happens to be chiasmatic:

A. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant. [Jeremiah 1:10]

B. Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said, I see a rod of an almond tree. [Jeremiah 1:11]

[Framed material between Jeremiah and 24.]

B. Then said the LORD unto me, What seest thou, Jeremiah? And I said, Figs; the good figs, very good; and the evil, very evil, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. [Jeremiah 24:3]

A. For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. [Jeremiah 24:6]

So, returning to Bowen’s argument, recall that he posited 1 Nephi 1:1 with its threefold focus on good/goodness as the opening frame of his posited *inclusio*. The closing frame is a threefold emphasis on doing good in 2 Nephi 33, the final chapter of his corpus.

First comes 2 Nephi 33:4:

19. Kevin L. Barney, “How to Worship Our Mother in Heaven (Without Getting Excommunicated),” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 41, no. 4 (Winter 2008):128-29.

20. “Inclusio,” Wikipedia, last edited November 20, 2017, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inclusio>.

And I know that the Lord God will consecrate my prayers for the gain of my people. And the words which I have written in weakness will be made strong unto them; for it **persuadeth them to do good; it maketh known** unto them of their fathers, and it speaketh of Jesus, and **persuadeth** them to believe in him, and to endure to the end, which is life eternal.

Bowen notes that Nephi starts by referring to “the words which I have written” in the plural but then conceptualizes his plural words as a singular with “it persuadeth to do good” and subsequent singular forms, apparently conceptualizing his record as a single, unified production.²¹

Second comes 2 Nephi 33:10:

And now, my beloved brethren, and also Jew, and all ye ends of the earth, hearken unto these words and believe in Christ; and if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ. And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and they teach all men that they should **do good**.

Bowen notes that the verb *believe* is repeated five times in this verse alone, and the end of such belief is that all should do good.

Third and finally comes the next to last verse of his corpus, 2 Nephi 33:14:

And you that will not partake of the **goodness of God**, and respect the words of the Jews, and also my words, and the words which shall proceed forth out of the mouth of the Lamb of God, behold, I bid you an everlasting farewell, for these words shall condemn you at the last day.

So does this threefold mention of good/goodness in Nephi’s final words suffice to constitute a close bracket to the open bracket of the threefold invocation of *good* in 1 Nephi 1? I think it does. And I take it that the point of this inclusio is to highlight the importance of the goodness of God as a conceptual theme throughout his writings. By my count Nephi uses the terms good/goodness a total of 31 times throughout his writings (only four of which derive from the lengthy Isaiah material incorporated in toto in 2 Nephi), so his emphasis on the goodness of God does seem to be a major theme of his work.

21. On the phenomenon of deflected agreement in number between subject and verb see Andrew Smith, “Deflected Agreement in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 21, no. 2 (2012): 40–57.

Bowen also points out that later writers imitated Nephi’s introduction in writing their own. I was particularly impressed by his comparison of the introduction of Enos with that of Nephi.

1 Nephi 1:1	Enos 1:1
<p><i>I, Nephi [Egyptian nfr (nfi) = good(ly)]</i> having been born of goodly <i>parents</i> therefore I was <i>taught</i> somewhat in all the <i>learning of my father</i></p>	<p><i>I, Enos</i> [Hebrew ‘enos = “man”] knowing my <i>father</i> that he was a <i>just man</i> for he <i>taught</i> me in <i>his language</i></p>

What particularly impressed me about this presentation was that where Nephi makes a pun on his name (meaning “good”) by referring to his goodly parents, Enos similarly makes a pun on his own name (meaning “man”) by referring to his father as a just man.

Conclusion

I found Bowen’s exploration of the significance of names and wordplay concerning them in Mormon scripture to be both fun and interesting. He obviously has the background knowledge and personal interest to do this and do it well. Reading these passages through the lens of Bowen’s insights helps to bring the text to life. I recommend the book to those who enjoy this type of detailed scriptural study.

Kevin L. Barney is the managing partner of the Chicago office of Kutak Rock LLP, an Omaha-based law firm, where he practices public finance law. He received a BA in classics from Brigham Young University in 1982, a JD from the University of Illinois College of Law in 1985, and an LLM in taxation from DePaul University in 1990. His primary interest in Mormon Studies is as a scripturist. He blogs at bycommonconsent.com.

Appendix: A Synopsis of the Sixteen Essays

[Editor’s Note: This appendix is reproduced from Name as Key-Word: Collected Essays on Onomastic Wordplay and the Temple in Mormon Scripture, 1-lviii. Footnote references have been changed to reflect numbering in this review.]

Nephi’s Good Inclusio. In the opening chapter I endeavor to demonstrate that Nephi’s name²² and its meaning (adj. “good,” “goodly,” “fine,” “fair”; noun = “goodness”) was not only important in terms of Nephi’s autobiography²³ but also was the overarching message of his writings. Nephi concludes his personal writings on the small plates using the terms “good” and “goodness of God.” This terminological bracketing, a literary device used anciently, is called *inclusio*. Nephi’s literary emphasis on “good” and “goodness” not only befits his personal name but fulfills the Lord’s directive, “Thou shalt engraven many things ... which are *good* in my sight” (2 Nephi 5:30), a command which also plays on the name Nephi. This essay further shows how Nephi’s autobiographical introduction and conclusion proved to be enormously influential on subsequent writers. Some of Nephi’s successors modeled autobiographical and narrative biographical introductions on 1 Nephi 1:1–2 and based sermons — especially concluding sermons — on Nephi’s “good” conclusion in 2 Nephi 33. An emphasis in all these sermons is that all “good”/“goodness” ultimately has its source in God and Christ.

“Most Desirable Above All Things.” This volume’s second essay examines the linguistic connection between the names Mary (Egyptian, “beloved”), Mormon, and the “love of God.” The names Mary and Mormon most plausibly derive from the Egyptian lexeme *mr(i)*, “love, desire, [or] wish.” Mary denotes “beloved [i.e., of deity]” and is thus conceptually connected with divine love, while Mormon evidently denotes “desire/love is enduring.” Upon seeing Mary (“the mother of God,” 1 Nephi 11:18, critical text) bearing the infant Messiah in her arms in vision, Nephi, who already knew that God “loveth his children,” perceived that the meaning of the fruit-bearing tree of life “is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore it is the most desirable above all things” (1 Nephi 11:17–25). Many generations later, Alma the Elder and his people entered into a covenant and formed a church based on “love” and “good desires” (Mosiah 18:21, 28), a covenant directly tied to the waters of Mormon and “desire” (Mosiah 18:8–11). Alma the Younger, in the next generation, recalled the “song of redeeming love” that his father and others had sung

22. John Gee, “A Note on the Name Nephi,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992): 189–91; idem, “Four Suggestions on the Origin of the Name Nephi,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 1–5.

23. Matthew L. Bowen, “Internal Textual Evidence for the Egyptian Origin of Nephi’s Name,” *Insights* 22/11 (2002): 2; idem, “‘O Ye Fair Ones’: An Additional Note on the Meaning of the Name Nephi,” *Insights* 23/6 [2003]: 2–3.

at the waters of Mormon (Alma 5:3–9, 26; see Mosiah 18:30). Mormon, whose father Mormon named his son after himself and the land of Mormon and its waters (3 Nephi 5:12), repeatedly characterized charity as “everlasting love” or the “pure love of Christ [that] endureth forever” (Moroni 7:47–48, 8:16–17, 26). All of this has implications for Latter-day Saints or “Mormons,” who, as children of the covenant, must endure to the end in Christlike “love” as Mormon and Moroni did, particularly in days of diminishing faith, faithfulness, and love (see, e.g., Mormon 3:12; contrast Moroni 9:5).

Joseph, Benjamin, and Gezera Shawa. The third essay endeavors to show how the Book of Mormon contains several quotations from the Hebrew Bible that have been juxtaposed on the basis of shared words or phrases, this for the purpose of interpreting the cited scriptural passages in light of one another. Nephi and his successors employed an exegetical technique — one that Jesus himself used — that came to be known in later rabbinic times as *Gezera Shawa* (“equal statute”). In several additional instances, the use of *Gezera Shawa* converges with onomastic wordplay. Nephi uses a *Gezera Shawa* involving Isaiah 11:11 and Isaiah 29:14 twice on the basis of the *yāsap* verb forms *yôsîp/yôsîp* (2 Nephi 25:17 and quoting the Lord in 2 Nephi 29:1) to create a stunning wordplay on the name “Joseph.” In another instance, King Benjamin uses *Gezera Shawa* involving Psalm 2:7, 2 Samuel 7:14, and Deuteronomy 14:1 (1–2) on the basis of the Hebrew noun *bēn* (“son”; plural *bānîm*, *bānôt*, “sons” and “daughters”) on which to build a rhetorical wordplay on his own name. This second, sophisticated wordplay, which further alludes to Psalm 110:1 on account of the noun *yāmîn* (“right hand”), was ready-made for King Benjamin’s temple audience, who, on the occasion of Mosiah’s coronation, were receiving their own “endowment” to become “sons” and “daughters” at God’s “right hand.” The use of *Gezera Shawa* was often christological — e.g., Jacob’s *Gezera Shawa* on *’eben* (“stone”) in Jacob 4:15–17 and Alma’s *Gezera Shawa* on Zenos’s and Zenock’s phrase “because of thy Son” in Alma 33:11–16 (see Alma 33:4–17). Taken together, these examples suggest that we should pay more attention to scripture’s use of scripture and, in particular, the use of this exegetical practice. In doing so, we will better discern the ancient prophetic messages preserved in the Book of Mormon.

“What Thank They the Jews?” In the fourth essay I examine a wordplay on the name Judah/Jews against the backdrop of etiologies for the name Judah in Genesis 30 and 49, and the Lord’s repeated warning against Gentile (including gentile Christian) antisemitism in the Book of

Mormon. Genesis explains the meaning of the personal and tribal name “Judah” — from which the term “Jews” derives — in terms of “praising” or “thanking” (**ydy/ydh*). In other words, the “Jews” are those who are to be “praised out of a feeling of gratitude.” The Genesis etiologies have important implications for the Lord’s words to Nephi regarding Gentile ingratitude and antisemitism across the centuries: “And what thank they the Jews for the Bible which they receive from them?” (2 Nephi 29:4). Gentile Christian antisemitism, like the concomitant doctrine of supersessionism, can be traced (in part) to widespread misunderstanding and misapplication of Paul’s words regarding Jews and “praise” (Romans 2:28–29). Moreover, the strongest scriptural warnings against antisemitism are to be found in the Book of Mormon, which also offers the reassurance that the Jews are still “mine ancient covenant people” (2 Nephi 29:4–5) and testifies of the Lord’s love and special concern for them.

“And There Wrestled a Man with Him”: **Jacob, Enos, Israel, and Peniel.** In the fifth chapter I propose several instances in which the Book of Mormon prophet Enos uses wordplay on his own name, the name of his father “Jacob,” the place name “Peniel,” and Jacob’s new name “Israel” in order to connect his experiences to those of his ancestor Jacob in Genesis 32–33, thus infusing them with greater meaning. Familiarity with Jacob and Esau’s conciliatory “embrace” in Genesis 33 is essential to understanding how Enos views the Atonement of Christ and the ultimate realization of its blessings in his life.

Young Man, Hidden Prophet: Alma. In the sixth chapter I examine how the biographical introduction of Alma the Elder into the Book of Mormon narrative (Mosiah 17:2) also introduces the name Alma into the text for the first time, this in close juxtaposition with a description of Alma as a “young man.” The best explanation for the name Alma is that it derives from the Semitic term *glm* (Hebrew *‘elem*) — “young man,” “youth,” “lad.” This strongly suggests the possibility of an intentional wordplay on the name Alma in the Book of Mormon’s underlying text: Alma became “[God’s] young man” or “servant.” Additional lexical connections between Mosiah 17:2 and Mosiah 14:1 (quoting Isaiah 53:1) suggest that Abinadi identified Alma as the one “to whom” or “upon whom” (*‘al-mî*) the Lord was “reveal[ing]” his arm as Abinadi’s prophetic successor. Alma began his prophetic succession when he “believed” Abinadi’s report and pled with King Noah for Abinadi’s life. Forced to flee, Alma began his prophetic ministry “hidden” and “concealed” while writing the words of Abinadi and teaching them “privately.” The

narrative's dramatic emphasis on this aspect of Alma's life suggests an additional thread of wordplay that exploits the homonymy between Alma and the Hebrew root **'lm*, forms of which mean "to hide," "conceal," "be hidden," or "be concealed." The richness of the wordplay and allusion revolving around Alma's name in Mosiah 17–18 accentuates his importance as a prophetic figure and founder of the later Nephite church. Moreover, it suggests that Alma's name was appropriate: the details we learn of his life demonstrate that he lived up to the positive connotations latent in his name.

Father Is a Man: Abish. In the seventh essay I begin with the observation that the mention of "Abish" and a "remarkable vision of her father" (Alma 19:16) is itself remarkable, since women and servants are rarely named in the Book of Mormon text. As a Hebrew-Lehite name, "Abish" suggests the meaning "Father is a man," the midrashic components *'ab-* ("father") and *'iš* ("man") being phonologically evident. Thus, the immediate juxtaposition of the name "Abish" with the terms "her father" and "women" raises the possibility of wordplay on her name in the underlying text. Since *'ab-* names were frequently theophoric — i.e., they had reference to a divine Father (or could be so understood) — the mention of "Abish" ("Father is a man") takes on additional theological significance in the context of Lamoni's vision of the Redeemer being "born of a woman and . . . redeem[ing] all mankind" (Alma 19:13). The wordplay on "Abish" thus contributes thematically to the narrative's presentation of Ammon's typological ministrations among the Lamanites as a "man" endowed with great power, which helped the Lamanites understand the concept of "the Great Spirit" (Yahweh) becoming "man." Moreover, this wordplay accords with the consistent Book of Mormon doctrine that the "very Eternal Father" would (and did) condescend to become "man" and Suffering Servant.

"They Were Moved with Compassion." The eighth essay explores hebraistic toponymic wordplay on the names Zarahemla and Jershon in the Lamanite emigration narratives. As in Hebrew biblical narrative, wordplay on (or play on the meaning of) toponyms, or "place names," constitutes a discernable feature of Book of Mormon narrative. The text repeatedly juxtaposes the toponym Jershon ("place of inheritance" or "place of possession") with terms "inherit," "inheritance," "possess," "possession," and the like. Similarly, the Mulekite personal name Zarahemla ("seed of compassion," "seed of pity"), which becomes the paramount Nephite toponym as their national capital after the time of Mosiah I, is juxtaposed with the term "compassion." Both wordplays occur and recur at crucial points in Nephite-Lamanite history. Moreover, both

occur in connection with the migration of the first generation Lamanite converts. The Jershon wordplay recurs in the second generation, when the people of Ammon receive the Zoramite (re)converts into the land of Jershon, and wordplay on Zarahemla recurs subsequently, when the sons of these Lamanite converts come to the rescue of the Nephite nation. Rhetorical wordplay on Zarahemla also surfaces in important speeches later in the Book of Mormon.

“See That Ye Are Not Lifted Up”: Zoram and the Rameumptom.

In the ninth essay I propose that the most likely etymology for the name Zoram is a verbal (third person singular perfect *qal* or *pô'al*) form of the Semitic-Hebrew lexeme **zrm*, meaning, “He [God] has [is] poured forth in floods.” However, the name could also have been heard and interpreted as a theophoric *-rām* name, of which there are many in the biblical Hebrew onomasticon (e.g., Ram, Abram, Abiram, Joram/Jehoram, Malchiram; cf. Hiram [Hyrum] or Hiram), whether or not it originated as such. Thus analyzed, Zoram would connote something like “the one who is high,” “the one who is exalted,” or even “the person of the Exalted One [or high place].” This has important implications for the later pejoration of the name Zoram and its gentilic derivative Zoramites in Alma’s and Mormon’s account of the Zoramite apostasy and the attempts made to rectify it in Alma 31–35 (cf. Alma 38–39). Mormon also describes the Rameumptom as a high “stand” or “a place for standing, high above the head” (Hebrew *rām*; Alma 31:13) — not unlike the “great and spacious building” (which “stood as it were in the air, high above the earth”; see 1 Nephi 8:26) — which suggests a double wordplay on the name “Zoram” in terms of *rām* and Rameumptom in Alma 31. Moreover, Alma plays on the idea of Zoramites as those being “high” or “lifted up” when counseling his son Shiblon to avoid being like the Zoramites and replicating the mistakes of his brother Corianton (Alma 38:3–5, 11–14). Mormon, perhaps influenced by the Zoramite apostasy and the magnitude of its effects, may have incorporated further pejorative wordplay on the Zoram-derived names Cezoram and Seezoram in order to emphasize that the Nephites had become lifted up in pride like the Zoramites during the judgeships of those judges. The Zoramites and their apostasy represent a type of Latter-day Gentile pride and apostasy, of which Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni warned repeatedly.

“He Is a Good Man.” The tenth essay returns to the subject of the name Nephi and its significance within the Helaman narratives. Mormon, as an author and editor, was concerned to show the fulfillment of earlier Nephite prophecy when such fulfillment occurred. Mormon

took care to show that Nephi and Lehi, the sons of Helaman, fulfilled their father's prophetic and parenetic expectations regarding them as enshrined in their given names — the names of their “first parents.” It had been “said and also written” (Helaman 5:6–7) that Nephi's and Lehi's namesakes were “good” in 1 Nephi 1:1. Using onomastic play on the meaning of “Nephi,” Mormon demonstrates in Helaman 8:7 that it also came to be said and written of Nephi the son of Helaman that he was “good.” Moreover, Mormon shows Nephi that his brother Lehi was “not a whit behind him” in this regard (Helaman 11:19). During their lifetimes — i.e., during the time of the fulfillment of Mosiah's forewarning regarding societal and political corruption (see Mosiah 29:27) that especially included secret combinations — Nephi and Lehi stood firm against increasingly popular organized evil.

My People Are Willing: Aminadab. The eleventh essay explores how Aminadab, a Nephite by birth who later dissented to the Lamanites, played a crucial role in the mass conversion of three hundred Lamanites (and eventually many others). At the end of the pericope in which these events are recorded, Mormon states: “And thus we see that the Lord began to pour out his Spirit upon the Lamanites, because of their easiness and willingness to believe in his words” (Helaman 6:36), whereas he “began to withdraw” his Spirit from the Nephites “because of the wickedness and the hardness of their hearts” (Helaman 6:35). The name Aminadab is a Semitic/Hebrew name meaning “my kinsman is willing” or “my people are willing.” As a dissenter, Aminadab was a man of two peoples. Mormon and (probably) his source were aware of the meaning of Aminadab's name and the irony of that meaning in the context of the latter's role in the Lamanite conversions and the spiritual history of the Nephites and Lamanites. The narrative's mention of Aminadab's name (Helaman 5:39, 41) and Mormon's echoes of it in Helaman 6:36, 3 Nephi 6:14, and elsewhere have covenant and temple significance not only in their ancient scriptural setting, but also for latter-day readers of the Book of Mormon.

Getting Cain and Gain. The twelfth chapter explains how the biblical etiology (story of origin) for the name “Cain” associates his name with the Hebrew verb *qny/qnh*, “to get,” “gain,” “acquire,” “create,” or “procreate” in a positive sense. A fuller form of this etiology, known to us indirectly through the Book of Mormon text and directly through the restored text of the Joseph Smith Translation, creates additional wordplay on “Cain” that associates his name with murder to “get gain.” This fuller narrative is thus also an etiology for organized evil — secret

combinations “built up to get power and gain” (Ether 8:22–23, 11:15). The original etiology exerted a tremendous influence on Book of Mormon writers (e.g., Nephi, Jacob, Alma, Mormon, and Moroni) who frequently used allusions to this narrative and sometimes replicated the wordplay on “Cain” and “getting gain.” The fuller narrative seems to have exerted its greatest influence on Mormon and Moroni, who witnessed the destruction of their nation firsthand — destruction catalyzed by Cainitic secret combinations. Moroni, in particular, invokes the Cain etiology in describing the destruction of the Jaredites by secret combinations. The destruction of two nations by Cainitic secret combinations stands as two witnesses and a warning to latter-day Gentiles (and Israel) against building up these societies and allowing them to flourish.

Place of Crushing: Heshlon. Chapter thirteen, co-written with Pedro Olavarria, explains how the name Heshlon, attested once (in Ether 13:28) as a toponym in the Book of Mormon, most plausibly denotes “place of crushing.” The meaning of Heshlon thus takes on significance in the context of Ether 13:25–31, which describes the crushing or enfeebling of Coriantumr’s armies and royal power. This meaning is also important in the wider context of Moroni’s narrative of the Jaredites’ destruction. Fittingly, Moroni’s mention of the name Heshlon itself serves as a literary turning point in the chiasmic structure of a text that describes the fateful reversal of Coriantumr’s individual fortunes and the worsening of the Jaredites’ collective fortunes. Moroni, who witnessed the gradual crushing and destruction of the Nephites, seemingly mentioned this name in his abridgement of the book of Ether on account of the high irony of its meaning in view of the Jaredite war of attrition which served as precursor to the destruction of the Nephites.

“In the Mount of the Lord It Shall Be Seen” and “Provided.” Chapter fourteen examines the ancient temple as a place where, for ancient Israelites, sacrifice and theophany (i.e., seeing God or other heavenly beings) converged. The account of Abraham’s “arrested” sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22) and the account of the arrested slaughter of Jerusalem following David’s unauthorized census of Israel (2 Samuel 24, 1 Chronicles 21) served as etiological narratives — explanations of “cause” or “origin” — for the location of the Jerusalem temple and its sacrifices. Thematic wordplay on the verb *rā’â* (to “see”) in these narratives creates an etiological link between the place-names “Jehovah-jireh,” “Moriah,” and the threshing floor of Araunah/Ornan, pointing to the future location of the Jerusalem temple as the place of theophany and sacrifice *par excellence*. Isaac’s “arrested” sacrifice and the vicarious

animal sacrifices of the temple anticipated Jesus’s later “un-arrested” sacrifice since, as Jesus himself stated, “Abraham rejoiced to see my day” (John 8:56). Sacrifice itself constituted a kind of theophany in which one’s own redemption could be “seen,” and the scriptures of the Restoration confirm that Abraham and many others, even “a great many thousand years before” the coming of Christ, “saw” Jesus’s sacrifice and “rejoiced.” Additionally, theophany and sacrifice converge in the canonized revelations regarding the building of the latter-day temple. These temple revelations begin with a promise of theophany, and mandate sacrifice from the Latter-day Saints. In essence, the temple itself was, and is, Christ’s Atonement having its intended effect on humanity.

Founded Upon a Rock: Peter’s Surnaming. The fifteenth chapter recommends that the famous *Petros/petra* wordplay in Matthew 16:18 does not constitute Jesus’s identification of Peter as the “rock” upon which his Church would be built. This wordplay does however identify him with that “rock” or “bedrock” inasmuch as Peter, a small “seer-stone” (cf. JST John 1:42), had the potential to become like the Savior himself, “the Rock of Ages” or “Rock of Heaven” (Moses 7:53). One aspect of that “rock” is the revelation that comes through faith that Jesus is the Messiah. Other aspects of that same rock are the other principles and ordinances of the gospel, including temple ordinances. The temple, a symbol of the Savior and his body, is also a symbol of the eternal family — the “sure house” built upon a rock.²⁴ As such, the temple is the perfect embodiment of Peter’s labor in the priesthood, against which hell will not prevail (Matthew 16:18).

You More Than Owe Me This Benefit: Philemon and Onesimus. The sixteenth chapter analyzes Paul’s use of wordplay and punning involving the names Philemon (Φιλήμων, “affectionate one”) and Onesimus (Ονήσιμος, “useful”) and their meanings in his letter to Philemon, the believing (anachronistically “Christian”) owner of a converted slave named Onesimus. It further notes and analyzes concomitant paronomasia involving the name-title Χριστός (*Christos*) and various homonymic terms. All of this wordplay constitutes a key element in Paul’s polite, diplomatic, and carefully worded letter. Paul artfully uses Philemon’s own name to play on the latter’s affections and to remind him that despite whatever Onesimus may owe (ὀφείλει, *opheilei*) Philemon, Philemon more than owes (προσοφείλεις, *prosopheileis*) his very self — i.e., his life as a Christian and thus his eternal wellbeing — to Paul. Hence, Philemon “more than owes” Paul his request to have Onesimus

24. Matthew 7:24–25; cf. 1 Samuel 2:35, 25:28; 2 Samuel 7:16; 1 Kings 11:38.

— who was once “useless” or “unprofitable” and “without Christ,” but is now “profitable” and “well-in-Christ” — as a fellow worker in the gospel. In a further (polyptotic) play on Onesimus, Paul expresses his urgent desire to “have the benefit” (ὀναίμην, *onaimēn*) of Onesimus in the Lord out of Philemon’s own free will and with his blessing, since all three are now brothers in Christ, and thus slaves to Christ, their true “master.” In the context of Paul’s use of –χρηστός (*–chrēstos*) and ὀναίμην (*onaimēn*), Paul’s desire for Philemon’s voluntary “good deed” or “benefit” (τὸ ἀγαθὸν σου, *to agathon sou*) is to be understood as the granting of Onesimus and as the point and climax of this publicly read letter.

In these sixteen chapters, it is hoped the reader will recognize the enormous importance of names in ancient scriptural narrative — not only the in Hebrew Bible, but also in the New Testament, Book of Mormon, and Pearl of Great Price. An awareness of the meanings of names in their narratological context often leads to a deeper understanding of the messages intended by ancient authors and editors and enhances our appreciation of the meaning of the temple and its ordinances which are, among many things, very name-centric.