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## “That Which They Most Desired”: The Waters of Mormon, Baptism, the Love of God, and the Bitter Fountain

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# “THAT WHICH THEY MOST DESIRED”: THE WATERS OF MORMON, BAPTISM, THE LOVE OF GOD, AND THE BITTER FOUNTAIN

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Matthew L. Bowen

**ABSTRACT:** *Paronomasia in the Hebrew text of Exodus creates narrative links between the name Miriam (Mary) and the “waters” (mayim) of the Re[e]d Sea from which Israel is “pulled” and the nearby “bitter” waters of Marah. Nephi sees Mary (Mariam), the mother of Jesus, associated with the “love of God,” and thus to both “the tree of life” and “the fountain of living waters” (1 Nephi 11:25) vis-à-vis “the fountain of filthy water” (1 Nephi 12:16). Mormon was named after “the land of Mormon” (3 Nephi 5:12). He associates his given name with “waters,” which he describes as a “fountain of pure water” (Mosiah 18:5), and with the good “desires” and “love” that Alma the Elder’s converts manifest at the time of their baptism (Mosiah 18:8, 10–11, 21, 28). Mormon’s accounts of the baptisms of Alma the Elder’s people, Limhi’s people, the people at Sidom (Alma 15:13), and a few repentant Nephites at Zarahemla who responded to Samuel the Lamanite’s preaching (Helaman 16:1), anticipate Jesus’s eventual reestablishment of the church originally founded by Alma, the baptism of his disciples, and their reception of the Holy Ghost — “that which they most desired” (see 3 Nephi 19:9–14, 24). Desire serves as a key term that links all of these baptismal scenes. Mormon’s analogy of “the bitter fountain” and its “bitter water” vis-à-vis the “the good fount” and its “good water” — which helps set up his discussion of “the pure love of Christ,” which “endureth forever” (Moroni 7:47–48) — should be understood against the backdrop of Lehi’s dream as Nephite “cultural narrative” and the history of Alma the Elder’s people at the waters of Mormon. As Mormon’s people lose the “love [which] endureth by faith unto prayer” (Moroni 8:26; see also Moroni 8:14–17; 9:5) they become like the “bitter fountain” (Moroni 7:11) and do not endure to the end in faith, hope, and charity on the covenant path (cf. 2 Nephi 31:20; Moroni 7:40–88; 8:24–26). The name Mormon*

(“*desire is enduring*” or “*love is enduring*”), as borne by the prophet-editor of the Book of Mormon, embraces the whole cloud of these associations.

A previous study<sup>1</sup> examined the names *Miriam/Mary* and *Mormon* as derivations from the common Egyptian lexeme and onomastic element *mr(i)*, “love, wish, desire.”<sup>2</sup> As such, *Mary* (Hebrew *miryām* [*mrym*] < Egyptian *mry.t*) most plausibly denotes “beloved [of a deity].”<sup>3</sup> The name *Mormon* also appears to derive from *mr(i)* and *mn*,<sup>4</sup> denoting or connoting “love is enduring” or “(divine) love remains.” Here I acknowledge that the ultimate origin of the name *Mormon* (before its mention in *Mosiah* 18:4 and association with the fountain/waters in vv. 5, 8-11) and its entry into the Nephite onomasticon remain obscure. I also acknowledge that the precise rules for Nephite nomenclature and the incorporation of names at any stage of the Nephite language remain unknown at present. Nevertheless, I proceed under those cautions. The Egyptian onomastic elements *mr(i)* (“love”) and *mn* (“remain,” “endure”) are both common Egyptian onomastic elements<sup>5</sup> and at present are more promising than any Semitic or other explanation.<sup>6</sup>

If the above analyses are correct, divine “love” constitutes an important thread binding the names *Miriam/Mary* and *Mormon*

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1. Matthew L. 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. The author would like to especially thank Ryan L. Combs for his encouragement in examining the relationship between the “bitter fountain” in *Moroni* 7:11 and the waters of *Mormon* in *Mosiah* 18.

2. Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford, UK: Griffith Institute/Ashmolean Museum, 1999), 111. Hereafter cited as CDME.

3. See recently, e.g., James K. Hoffmeier (*Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005], 225), who notes regarding *Mary/Miriam*, “Although there are different linguistic explanations for the second *mem* [i.e., the final “m”], there is agreement that *mary* is the writing of the root *mry*, meaning ‘love’ or ‘beloved.’”

4. Benjamin Urrutia, “The Name Connection,” *New Era* (June 1983): 40; see also Paul Y. Hoskisson, “What’s in a Name? *Mormon* — Part 2,” *Insights* 32, no. 3 (2012): 3.

5. Hermann Ranke, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen* (Glückstadt, DEU: Augustin, 1935), 1:149-50; 155-63. Cf. the name *mr-mn-nfr* (p. 156).

6. Beyond Semitic or Egyptian explanations, there exists, of course, the possibility that “*Mormon*” originated with another people with whom the Nephites came into contact at some point. However, even here it possible for such names to have been regarded later as Egyptian by a people whose lexical resources included Egyptian throughout the entire stage of its existence (see *Moroni* 9:32-33).

together in terms of how Book of Mormon writers incorporated them. Nephi, whose education included Egyptian,<sup>7</sup> understood that God "loveth his children" (1 Nephi 11:17). However, when he saw Mary in vision, "the mother of God after the manner of the flesh" (1 Nephi 11:18, original text),<sup>8</sup> he also came to recognize that the tree of life represented "*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 11:22).<sup>9</sup> Mormon appears to reference his own name when he states that "charity is the pure *love* of Christ, and it *endureth* forever. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, *that ye may be filled with this love...*" (Moroni 7:48). He appears to do so again in a letter to his son Moroni: "And *I am filled with charity*, which is *everlasting love*, ... wherefore, I *love* little children with a *perfect love*" (Moroni 8:17); "which Comforter filleth with hope and *perfect love*, which *love endureth* by diligence unto prayer" (Moroni 18:26).

In addition to divine "love," another thread binds the names Mary/Miriam and Mormon to the "waters" and "fountains" with which the names Miriam/Mary and Mormon are associated in ancient Israelite and Nephite literature and tradition. Evidence from the Hebrew Bible suggests the paronomastic association of the phoneme *mr-* (including names with this phonemic element) and *māqôr* ("fountain") or *mayim* ("waters") — e.g., the re-motivation of the Egyptian name Merneptah in Zechariah 13:1 (see p. 278).

In this article, I discuss how wordplay in the Hebrew Bible associates the name Mary or Miriam with the "waters" (*mayim*) of the Re[e]d Sea through which Israel is redeemed and the nearby "bitter" waters of Marah, which the Lord made "sweet." Moreover, in Nephi's vision of the

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7. See especially 1 Nephi 1:2.

8. The Book of Mormon citations here will generally follow Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

9. The language of additional passages connects Mary with the tree of life: "And behold, he shall be born of Mary at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God" (Alma 7:10); "And it came to pass after I had seen the tree, I said unto the Spirit: I behold thou hast shown unto me the tree which is precious above all" (1 Nephi 11:9); "Wherefore the wicked are separated from the righteous and also from that tree of life, whose fruit is most precious and most desirable of all other fruits; yea, and it is the greatest of all the gifts of God. And thus I spake unto my brethren. Amen" (1 Nephi 15:36). See also Alma 32:42.

tree of life, he sees Mary associated with the “love of God” and thus also to “the fountain of living waters” (1 Nephi 11:25), opposite the fountain of filthy water (1 Nephi 12:16; cf. the “tree of life” opposite “the tree of knowledge of good and evil”).<sup>10</sup> Mormon states that he was named after “the land of Mormon” (3 Nephi 5:12), first mentioned in Mosiah 18, with its “waters,” which are initially described as a “fountain” (“Now there was in Mormon a fountain of pure water,” Mosiah 18:5).<sup>11</sup> The “desires” and “love” of Alma’s converts as manifest at and after the time of their baptism in the waters of Mormon not only provide a basis for Mormon’s “re-motivation” of this name, but have important implications for the baptismal scene in 3 Nephi 19. I will further attempt to show how Mormon’s depiction of the baptismal scene in 3 Nephi 19 deliberately recalls the baptismal scene in Mosiah 18 and later baptismal scenes pertaining to the church founded by Alma the Elder.

Moreover, I argue that Mormon’s fountain analogy (“For behold, a bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water, neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water,” Moroni 7:11) should be understood in the context of the foregoing. Mormon points out that the love of God proceeds from the “good fountain” — i.e., “every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good and to *love God* and to serve him is inspired of God” (Moroni 7:13). This is necessary to understanding Mormon’s discussion of charity, wherein he plays on his own name multiple times. The Nephites perish as a people and as a society because they become like the “bitter” fountain, of which Mormon spoke.

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10. Cf. 2 Nephi 2:15: “It must needs be that there was an opposition, even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life, the one being sweet and the other bitter.”

11. Cf. the echoes of the scene in Mosiah 18 when Mormon describes the “very beautiful and pleasant land, a land of pure water” in which Alma the Elder settled his people after being forced to flee from the land of Mormon (Mosiah 23:4). There may be further echoes of the name “Mormon” and the “waters of Mormon” when he later writes, regarding Alma, “And the people were *desirous* that Alma should be their king, for he was *beloved* by his people” (Mosiah 23:6). In response, Alma recounts their having been “oppressed by king Noah” and their “bondage to him” and his priests, including the bondage of “iniquity” — “the bonds of iniquity” — bitter experiences in the Egypt-like bondage of sin (Mosiah 23:7-14). He then reminds them that “every man should *love* his neighbor as himself, that there should be no contention among them” (Mosiah 23:15), just as “their hearts [had been] knit together in unity and in *love* one towards another” at the waters of Mormon (Mosiah 18:21).

## The Phoneme *mr-* in Hebrew and Egyptian

In Egyptian and Hebrew, the phoneme *mr-* had a variety of connotations and associations, some of them interrelated. Some of them related to how Nephi and his successors understood *mr*-names and waters and fountains they associated with the salvation history of Israel in general and those associated with baptism in particular.

In Hebrew, as in Semitic languages generally,<sup>12</sup> the phoneme *mr-* in the verbal roots *mry/mrh* and *mrr* acquired pejorative associations, emerging from the idea of “bitter” or “bitterness.” For example, *mōrâ/mōrat*, “bitterness, sorrow,”<sup>13</sup> *mārâ*, “to rebel” or “to be recalcitrant, rebellious.”<sup>14</sup> Ugaritic attests a *mrr* root “to strengthen,” “to bless.”<sup>15</sup> However, whether this root ultimately derives from the Semitic root *\*mrr*, “bitter,” or represents an originally independent root *\*mrr*, “to be strong,” remains a matter of debate.<sup>16</sup>

Gábor Takács notes that “Eg[yp]tian] *mr* has been compared (often together with Sem[itic] *\*mr̥* or Ar[abic] *mrh*) [and] also with Semitic *\*mrr* ‘to be bitter,’ ... e.g., Hebrew *mrr* qal ‘1. to be bitter, 2. desperate, bewildered,’ *hifil* ‘to cause bitterness, grief, embitter.’”<sup>17</sup> But, he notes, “the semantic connection of ‘ill’ and ‘bitter’ is not evident”<sup>18</sup> from a comparison of root attestations and uses. Murtonen, too, suggests that “Eg /*mr*/ *be ill; painful (etc.)* does not seem to contain a connotation of bitterness.”<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, as Dennis Pardee suggests, “From a Hamito-Semitic perspective, a root possibly related to Semitic *mr(r)* ‘bitter’ came to be the general term in Egyptian for ‘pain’ and ‘illness.’”<sup>20</sup> Perhaps, too, it is significant that the early Egyptians drew a cognitive association between the lexeme *mr-* and the “hoe” or “harrow” (see

12. See A. Murtonen, *Hebrew in Its West Semitic Setting, Part One: A Comparative Lexicon* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 1989), 264.

13. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2001), 633. Hereafter cited as *HALOT*. See, e.g., Genesis 26:35.

14. *HALOT*, 632-33; see, e.g., Numbers 20:10; 1 Samuel 12:15; Isaiah 1:20; 50:5; 63:10.

15. Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition, Part L-Z*. 3rd rev. ed, trans. and ed. Wilfred G.E. Watson (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2015), 569-70.

16. Gábor Takács, *Etymological Dictionary of Egyptian, Volume 3: M-* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2008), 365.

17. *Ibid.*, 3:364.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Murtonen, *Hebrew in Its West Semitic Setting*, 1:264.

20. Dennis Pardee, “Mārīm in Numbers V,” *Vetus Testamentum* 35, no. 1 (1985): 112.

further below). None of this precludes the possibility of interlingual wordplay involving Semitic *mr-* and Egyptian *mr-* (“love”; “sick,” “painful”) and the Hebrew homonym *mr(r)*, “bitter.”

Antonio Loprieno observes that in Egyptian “a most frequent pun in love poetry revolves ... around the concept of ‘love.’”<sup>21</sup> As noted above, this idea is most frequently expressed in the verbal root *mr(i)*. Loprieno further notes that “the same sequence of consonants *mr(j)* is common to a variety of words that often appear, especially in love poetry, in paronomastic association with the concept of ‘love’: the ‘sickness’ (*mr*) caused by love.”<sup>22</sup> Egyptian *mr(i)* (“love,” “desire”) and its derivations were written with a “hoe” hieroglyph. In Akkadian, the lexeme *marru* denoted a “shovel, spade” (cf. a “hoe”) as well as “bitter.”<sup>23</sup> Similarly, morphologically identical verb forms of *marāru(m)* denoted “to be(come) bitter”; “be heavy, bitter; prevail” and “to break up (by digging)”<sup>24</sup> — i.e., “harrow up.” Egyptian \**mr* thus appears to derive somehow from Proto-Semitic \**marr-*, though how it comes into Egyptian remains a matter of debate.<sup>25</sup> Though the evidence remains far from conclusive, it is interesting to consider the apparent cognitive link between the “hoe”<sup>26</sup> (cf. “harrow”) — which as a determinative emphasized the idea of “cultivate, hack up” in the verbs ‘*d*, “hack up” and ‘*hbs* “cultivate,” “hoe”<sup>27</sup> — and the phoneme *mr* in some Egyptian *mr*-terms.

Alma links the idea of “harrowing” and “desire” or “wish” (cf. Egyptian verb *mr[i]*,<sup>28</sup> noun *mrw.t*)<sup>29</sup> in his famous lament:

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21. Antonio Loprieno, “Puns and Word Play in Ancient Egyptian” in *Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Scott B. Noegel (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2000), 17.

22. Ibid.

23. Jeremy Black, Andrew George, and Nicolas Postgate, *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (Wiesbaden, DEU: Harrassowitz, 2000), 198.

24. Ibid.

25. See Takács, *Etymological Dictionary of Egyptian*, 3:377.

26. Alan Gardiner, “List of Hieroglyphic Signs,” in *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd rev. ed. (Oxford, UK: Griffith Institute, 1957), 516, U6.

27. Ibid.

28. See, e.g., Friedrich Junge (*Late Egyptian Grammar: An Introduction*, tr. David Wharburton [Oxford, UK: Griffith Institute, 2005], 335), who glosses *mr(i)* as “to love, cherish, adore, covet, demand someone or something; to wish or want something; to wish, want, desire something for one’s self (with proposition n and reflexive pronouns); desire, choose.”

29. Junge (ibid.) glosses *mrw.t* as “love, ... wish, desire; choice, selection [in the sense of loving hierarchically from ‘above’], Late Egyptian *t3 mrw.t*.”

O that I were an angel and could have *the wish* of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people! Yea, I would declare unto every soul as with the voice of thunder repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might be no more sorrow upon all the face of the earth. But behold, I am a man and do sin in *my wish*, for I had ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me. *I had ought not to harrow up in my desires* the firm decree of a just God, for I know that he granteth unto men according to *their desires*, whether it be unto death or unto life. Yea, I know that he allotteth unto men, yea, decreeth unto them decrees which are unalterable according to their wills, whether it be unto salvation or unto destruction. Yea, and I know that good and evil hath come before all men [cf. the tree of life vis-à-vis the tree of knowledge of good and evil] — or he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless — but he that knoweth good and evil, to him it is given according to his *desires*, whether *he desireth* good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience. Now seeing that I know these things, *why should I desire* more than to perform the work to which I have been called? *Why should I desire* that I was an angel that I could speak unto all the ends of the earth? (Alma 29:1-7)

In describing the process of his spiritual rebirth, Alma the Younger repeatedly describes himself as having been “harrowed up” by his sins (Alma 36:12, 17, 19) and “in the gall of bitterness” (Alma 36:18), and he avers that “there can be nothing so exquisite and so *bitter* as was *my pains*” (Alma 36:21); “And it came to pass that I was three days and three nights in the *most bitter pain* and anguish of soul. And never until I did cry out unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy did I receive a remission of my sins” (Alma 38:8). Thus, Alma the Younger connects the “harrowing” of the soul with “desires”/“wishes,” “pain,” and “bitterness” that encompasses the prevalent sense of *mr-* in both Egyptian and Hebrew, languages of which Alma evidently had a working knowledge in the tradition of sacred Nephite record-keeping.<sup>30</sup>

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30. Cf., e.g., Moroni 9:32-33.

### Mormon, Miriam, and Songs of Redeeming Love

Donald W. Parry cites Mormon's description of the land, waters, and forest of Mormon as an example of deliberate epistrophe, or "like sentence endings."<sup>31</sup> This structural repetition contributes to the hymnodic quality of this verse:

And now it came to pass that all this was done in *Mormon*,  
yea, by the waters of *Mormon*,  
in the forest that was near the waters of *Mormon*;

yea, the place of *Mormon*,  
the waters of *Mormon*,  
the forest of *Mormon*.<sup>32</sup>

How beautiful are they to the eyes of them  
who there *came to the knowledge of their Redeemer!*  
yea, and how blessed are they,  
for they shall *sing to his praise forever*. (Mosiah 18:30)<sup>33</sup>

At no other point in the Book of Mormon is a toponym given so much immediate, direct, and poetic emphasis. A key point in the last part of this text is that the converts at the waters of Mormon "shall sing to [the] praise" of "their Redeemer." The future tense of the verb "they shall sing" strongly suggests that this text may not originate with Mormon at all, but perhaps with Alma the Elder or his converts.

In fact, the image of Alma the Elder's converts "sing[ing] to [the] praise" of "their Redeemer" at the waters of "Mormon" appears to constitute the basis for Alma the Younger's later use of an expression rendered: "sing redeeming love" or "sing the song of redeeming love": "And again I ask: Was the bands of death broken? And the chains of hell which encircled them about, were they loosed? I say unto you, Yea, they were loosed. And their souls did expand, and *they did sing redeeming love*. And I say unto you that they are saved" (Alma 5:9); "And now behold, I say unto you my brethren: If ye have experienced a change of heart and if ye have felt to *sing the song of redeeming love*, I would ask: Can ye feel so now?" (Alma 5:26). The name "Mormon" ("love"/"desire

31. Donald W. Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon: The Complete Text Reformatted* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2007), 198. See also his explanation of *epistrophe* on p. xl.

32. I have altered Parry's formatting slightly with the additional indentation of three lines.

33. The second half follows the formatting of Skousen (*Earliest Text*, 243).

is enduring") and Alma the Elder's people's experiences at the waters of Mormon are echoed in the word translated "love."

In this speech to the people of Zarahemla, Alma the Younger had immediate reference to the respective captivity and redemption stories<sup>34</sup> of Alma the Elder's people (see Alma 5:6)<sup>35</sup> and Limhi's people, although he probably had broader reference to earlier acts of divine deliverance in Israelite<sup>36</sup> and Lehite history. Some of the people in Zarahemla had belonged to Alma the Elder's and Limhi's former peoples, including perhaps Alma the Younger himself when he was very young. These redemption stories are rife with imagery from Israel's exodus from Egypt. For example, Mormon records that Amulon "exercised authority over them and put tasks upon them and put *taskmasters* over them. And now it came to pass that so great were *their afflictions* that they began to *cry mightily to God*" (Mosiah 24:9-10; cf. 21:14). Mormon's use of a term rendered "taskmasters" recalls the "taskmasters" of Exodus 1:11 (*šārê missîm*); 3:7; 5:6, 10, 13-14 (*nōgěšîm*).<sup>37</sup> Mormon's allusion to Exodus 3:7 is particularly relevant, given that both narrators mention the "cry" that came to God because of the "taskmasters": "I have surely seen *the affliction* [ *'onî*] of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their *cry* by reason of their *taskmasters*; for I know their sorrows" (Exodus 3:7).<sup>38</sup>

The exodus narrative emphasizes the "bitterness" of life in bondage. "And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: and *they made their lives bitter* [*waymārêrû*] with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour" (Exodus 1:13-14). The Egyptians' "making [the Israelites'] lives bitter" becomes the basis for the consumption of bitter herbs in the perennial commemoration of the Passover: "And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs [*měrorîm*] they shall eat it" (Exodus 12:8; cf. Numbers 9:11). What the "bitter herbs" represented in terms of the Israelites' "bitter" lives in physical bondage at the hands of the Egyptians (the antetype of the bondage that some Nephites experienced

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34. Mormon tells the captivity and redemption story of Limhi's people in Mosiah 19-22 and that of Alma the Elder's people in Mosiah 23-24.

35. See also, e.g., Mosiah 27:16; Alma 36:2.

36. See especially Alma 36:28-29; see also 1 Nephi 4:2.

37. Cf. Matthew L. Bowen, "'This Son Shall Comfort Us': An Onomastic Tale of Two Noahs," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 23 (2017): 292.

38. See also Exodus 2:23: "And the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage" (Exodus 2:23).

at the hands of Amulon and the Lamanites), Alma the Younger tasted or experienced in terms of “harrowing” and “bitter” spiritual bondage (Alma 36:12, 17–19, 21; 38:8).

Isaiah 63:9 offers a poetic and prophetic reflection on Israel’s bondage and Yahweh’s redeeming them therefrom: “In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his *love* and in his pity he *redeemed them* [gě’ālām].” When Alma the Younger uses collocations translated “sing redeeming love” (Alma 5:9; cf. also Ammon’s use of it in 26:13) and “the song of redeeming love” (Alma 5:26), he expresses the same truth that Isaiah 63:9 conveys.

The exodus narrative contains two “song[s] of redeeming love,” the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:1–19) and the Song of Miriam (Exodus 15:20–22). The Song of the Sea preserves Moses’s declaration “I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider *hath he thrown* [rāmâ] into the sea [bayyām]” (Exodus 15:1). Later in the song, the phrase alluded to in Isaiah 63 (“in his love and in his pity he redeemed them”) occurs: “Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which *thou hast redeemed* [gā’altā]: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation.” Within the arrangement of the text, the verb *rāmâ* (“throw,” “cast”) and the prepositional phrase *bayyām* (“into the sea”) anticipate the name Miriam (Mariam > Mary) and the wordplay on that name in the subsequent Song of Miriam:

And *Miriam* [miryām] the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels, and with dances. And *Miriam* [miryām] answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider *hath he thrown* [rāmâ] into the sea [bayyām]. So Moses brought Israel from the Re[e]d Sea [miyyam sūp]. (Exodus 15:20–22)

The exodus narrative earlier associates Miriam, Moses’s sister, with the scene in which Moses’s name is etiologically tied to his being “drawn” from the water by Pharaoh’s daughter (Exodus 2:10), after his mother placed him amidst “the reeds” (*hassūp*) where Pharaoh’s daughter found him (Exodus 2:3, 5). In Exodus 15:20–22 the narrator ties the name Miriam (*miryām*) to the “Reed Sea” (*bayyām/miyyam*) from which Moses brings Israel as the Lord’s “drawer” or “puller”: “Then they remembered the ancient days, Him, who pulled [mōšeh] His people out [of the water]: ‘Where is He who brought them up from the Sea’” (Isaiah 63:11, NJPS). The apostle Paul recognized how the exodus event correlates with the symbolism of baptism: “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should

be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Corinthians 10:1-2).

### **The Marah Etiology: The Bitter and the Sweet Water**

As Moshe Garsiel notes,<sup>39</sup> the wordplay on Miriam continues in the subsequent verses with a paronomastic etiology for Marah, which "set[s] up an associative link"<sup>40</sup> between this text and the foregoing songs:

So Moses brought Israel *from the Re[e]d sea* [*miyyam sūp*], and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water [*mayim*]. And when they came to *Marah* [*mārātâ*], they could not drink of *the waters* [*mayim*] of [from] *Marah* [*mimmārâ*], for they were *bitter* [*mārîm hēm*] therefore the name of it was called *Marah* [*mārâ*]. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into *the waters* [*hammayim*], *the waters* [*hammayim*] were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them. (Exodus 15:22–25)

Regarding the wordplay evident in this passage, Garsiel writes: "In the first unit we hear the [midrashic name derivation] of *mrym/rmh b-ym* ... and in the second unit, *mrth/mym m-mrh/mrym hm*. The sound resemblance binds the two units together and tightens the continuity of the text."<sup>41</sup>

Phillip D. King writes, "The adjective [*mārîm*] describing Marah's undrinkable water suggests a more general taste evaluation as bad."<sup>42</sup> This passage, together with the example of the bitter water ordeal in Numbers 5:18-19, 23-27, "suggest[s] that Hebrew has a general system that merges taste and evaluation, so the word for something tasting 'bitter' also describes substances that are 'bad' or 'harmful.'"<sup>43</sup> This has important implications for the nature of the "bitter fountain" described by Mormon

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39. Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*, trans. Phyllis Hackett (Ramat Gan, ISR: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 230–31.

40. *Ibid.*, 230.

41. *Ibid.*, 231.

42. Phillip D. King, *Surrounded by Bitterness: Image Schemas and Metaphors for Conceptualizing Distress in Classical Hebrew* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 328.

43. *Ibid.* Cf. Revelation 8:11.

in Moroni 7:11 and its conceptual relationship to “the fountain of filthy water” described by Nephi’s angelic guide in 1 Nephi 12:16.

The idea of “bitterness” in opposition to the “sweet” finds expression here in Exodus 15 as well as in Naomi’s self-renaming in Ruth 1:8: “Call me not Naomi [pleasant, sweet; cognate with Egyptian *ndm*], call me *Mara* [*mārā*] for the Almighty *hath dealt very bitterly* [*hēmar*] with me.” Lehi will describe the “tree of life” in opposition to the tree of knowledge of good and evil, “the one being sweet and the other bitter” (2 Nephi 2:15).

### **“The Fountain of All Righteousness”: The “Fountain of Living Waters” as “the Love of God”**

Nephi beholds that that both the “tree of life” and the “fountain of living waters” constitute representations of the “love of God”:

And it came to pass that I beheld that the *rod of iron* which my father had seen was the *word of God*, which led to the *fountain of living waters* or to the tree of life, *which waters are a representation of the love of God*. And I also beheld that *the tree of life was a representation of the love of God*. (1 Nephi 11:25)

As I have suggested elsewhere,<sup>44</sup> the “rod” as a “word” constitutes a wordplay that turns on the polysemy of the Egyptian lexeme *mdw* (“staff, rod”<sup>45</sup>; “word”; “speak”<sup>46</sup>), which is homophonous with Hebrew *matteh* (“rod”). As for the collocation, “fountain of living waters,” Nephi appears to have borrowed it from the early prophecies of Jeremiah that he possessed on the plates of brass.<sup>47</sup>

Jeremiah’s prophecies use the “fountain of living waters” collocation twice. In the first, the Lord metaphorically identifies himself as the *mēqôr mayim hayyîm*: “For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the *fountain of living waters* [*mēqôr mayim hayyîm*], and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water [*hammāyim*]” (Jeremiah 2:13). Jeremiah describes Israel-Judah’s apostasy and abandonment of Yahweh as the substitution of a sure

44. Matthew L. Bowen, “What Meaneth the Rod of Iron?” *Insights* 25, no. 2 (2005): 2-3.

45. Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford, UK: Griffith Institute/Ashmolean Museum, 1999), 122.

46. *Ibid.* All *mdw*-derived Egyptian words were originally written with the “walking stick”/“staff” (i.e., “rod”) hieroglyph (see Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 510). Thus “word” in its earliest Egyptian conception was literally identified with a “rod.”

47. See especially 1 Nephi 5:13; Helaman 8:20. Nephi quotes or paraphrases Jeremiah 17:5 in 2 Nephi 4:34; 28:31.

source of good water, *měqôr mayim hayyîm*, for a useless source: broken *bō'rôt* or *bō'rôt* (“cisterns,” “wells”). The second instance appears to be Jeremiah’s reflection upon the earlier oracle: “O Lord, *the hope of Israel* [*miqwê yisrā`ēl*] all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken *the fountain of living waters* [*měqôr mayim-hayyîm*]” (Jeremiah 17:13). Jeremiah’s use of *miqwê* in this context constitutes a double entendre and a play on the title “fountain of living waters”: *miqwê* (“hope,” or literally, an “awaiting”)<sup>48</sup> can also denote a “pool” or collection/awaiting of waters used in ablutions including ritual immersions (cf. also Hebrew *miqwâ*).<sup>49</sup>

Similar images recur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in reference to Yahweh or his law: “For with thee is *the fountain of life* [*měqôr hayyîm*]: in thy light shall we see light” (Psalms 36:9); “The law of the wise is a *fountain of life* [*měqôr hayyîm*], to depart from the snares of death” (Proverbs 13:14); “The fear of the Lord is a *fountain of life* [*měqôr hayyîm*], to depart from the snares of death” (Proverbs 14:27).<sup>50</sup>

Against this scriptural and cultural backdrop, we consider Lehi’s prophetic use of a fountain as a metaphor for Yahweh in the earliest pages of the Book of Mormon. Nephi records that Lehi used the first major perennial water source (i.e., an *’êtân* [source of the name Ethan]) that the family encountered on their journey along the Arabian coastline as a metaphor for the Lord and being faithful to the Lord: “And when my father saw that *the waters of the river emptied into the fountain of the Red Sea*, he spake unto Laman, saying: O that thou mightest be like unto this river, *continually running into the fountain of all righteousness*” (1 Nephi 2:9; cf. Amos 5:24: “But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream [*naḥal ’êtân*, i.e., a continual stream or perennial stream]”).<sup>51</sup>

This further helps our understanding of Lehi’s description of the “fountain” within his tree-of-life dream: “And I also beheld a strait and

48. See also, e.g., Genesis 1:10; Exodus 7:19; Leviticus 11:36.

49. Cf. Matthew L. Bowen, “Not Leaving and Going On to Perfection” (*A Review of Samuel M. Brown’s First Principles and Ordinances: The Fourth Article of Faith in Light of the Temple* [Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2014]) *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 16 (2015): 135–36.

50. Cf. the poet’s lover or “bride” in the Song of Songs being described as: “A fountain [spring, *ma’yan*] of gardens, a well of living waters [*bě’er mayim hayyîm*], and streams from Lebanon” (Song 4:15).

51. 1 Kings 8:2 describes the “seventh month” as the month of Ethanim (*hā’ētānîm*), the month through which the perennial streams continue to run rather than dry up.

narrow path which came along by the rod of iron, even to the tree by which I stood. And *it also led by the head of the fountain* unto a large and spacious field, as if it had been a world” (1 Nephi 8:20). Regarding this fountain and its head, David Calabro has noted additional details from Nephi’s vision:

It seems as if there are two fountains in Nephi’s vision, not just one. Nephi describes one of the fountains as if it were either very near the tree or perhaps even emanating from it, for he writes that the rod of iron led to this fountain, “or,” he says, “to the tree of life.” This fountain Nephi calls “the fountain of living waters, . . . which waters are a representation of the love of God” (1 Nephi 11:25). The second fountain is mentioned later by Nephi’s angelic guide: “Behold the fountain of filthy water which thy father saw; yea, even the river of which he spake; and the depths thereof are the depths of hell” (1 Nephi 12:16).<sup>52</sup>

It seems probable, then, that the “head of the fountain [perhaps Hebrew \*rōš hammāqôr]” mentioned by Lehi in 1 Nephi 8:20 is to be identified with the “the fountain of living waters [mēqôr mayim ḥayyîm]” mentioned by Nephi in 1 Nephi 11:25, the description of Yahweh that Nephi borrowed from Jeremiah (Jeremiah 2:13; 17:13), as noted above. In fact, Nephi appears to subtly allude to Jeremiah’s wordplay on *miqwê* and *mēqôr* — “hope of Israel”/“(ritual) pool of Israel” (*miqwê yiśrā’ēl*)<sup>53</sup> and “fountain of living waters” (*mēqôr mayim-ḥayyîm*) — when he urges: “Wherefore ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of *hope* [*miqwê* or *tiqwâ*] and a *love of God* [= “the fountain of living waters,” 1 Nephi 11:25; cf. 1 Nephi 11:22] and of all men; wherefore if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father, ye shall have *eternal life* [*ḥayyê ‘ôlām*]<sup>54</sup>” (2 Nephi 31:20; cf. *wāḥay lē’ôlām* in Genesis 3:22). Adding to the force of the Nephi’s allusion to *miqwê* and *māqôr* from Jeremiah 17:13, as noted above, is the polysemy of *miqwê* as both “hope” and a “gathering together” of waters — i.e., perhaps not just a “collecting” but an “awaiting” or “accumulation” of waters

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52. David Calabro, “Lehi’s Dream and the Garden of Eden,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 26 (2017): 270.

53. Jeremiah also uses the epithet “hope of Israel” in Jeremiah 14:8. Its attributed use by Paul in Acts 28:10 constitutes an allusion to its use in Jeremiah 14:8 and 17:13.

54. Daniel 12:2.

(assuming one *qwy/qwh* Hebrew root, rather than two).<sup>55</sup> Potential for similar wordplay exists here in Nephi's imagery too, given the evident connection between "press[ing] forward," the "word of Christ" and the "word of God"/"rod of iron" from Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision.<sup>56</sup>

In the context of Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision, the promise of the Father of eternal life ("thus saith the Father: ye shall have eternal life") belongs to those who come to "the fountain of living waters" and remain "at the tree of life" while *continuing* to partake of the fruit (see 1 Nephi 8:33). The symbolic value of "the fountain of living waters" as a "representation of the love of God" and ultimately of Yahweh himself is perhaps best articulated by Jesus to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's "well" or "fountain" (*pēgē tou Iakōb*)<sup>57</sup> in Sychar: "whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14).

The foregoing prepares us to appreciate two statements that Moroni makes in his abridged book of Ether. The first constitutes a statement of purpose for this abridgment: "Wherefore I Moroni am commanded to write these things that evil may be done away and that the time may come that Satan may have no power upon the hearts of the children of men, but that they may be persuaded to do good continually, that they may come unto *the fountain of all righteousness* and be saved" (Ether 8:26). The second is even more lucid, and almost constitutes a reiteration of 2 Nephi 31:20: "Behold, I will show unto the Gentiles their weakness. And I will show unto them that faith, hope, and charity bringeth unto me, the fountain of all righteousness" (Ether 12:28).

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55. HALOT (p. 1082) suggests that *qwy/qwh* as attested in Genesis 1:9 "probably represents a different root from" the *qwy/qwh* root rendered "await, hope," "wait." The evidence for this, however, remains scant. As a separate *qwy/qwh* (II) root, it would only be attested in the Niphal stem (and only in Genesis 1:9 and Jeremiah 3:17, while the *qwy/qwh* (I) root is otherwise missing a Niphal stem.

56. On the evident connections between Nephi's teaching of the doctrine of Christ, Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision, and the temple, see Jared T. Parker, "The Doctrine of Christ in 2 Nephi 31–32 as an Approach to the Vision of the Tree of Life," in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision* (2011 Sperry Symposium), ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011), 161–78.

57. John 4:5–6.

### “Behold the Fountain of Filthy Water”!

As noted above, Lehi explained, regarding the two trees in the Garden of Eden, “it must needs be that there was an opposition, even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life, the one being *sweet* and the other *bitter*” (2 Nephi 2:15). Just as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil functioned “in opposition” to the tree of life in the Garden of Eden, the second fountain — “the fountain of filthy water” — functioned “in opposition” to the “fountain of living waters.” Notably, the sweet/bitter binary that Lehi applies to the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil works for describing fountains, as we saw regarding the waters of Marah in Exodus 15:23-25.

The angelic guide in Nephi’s vision explains the symbolism of the “fountain of filthy water” to him thus: “And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold *the fountain* [Hebrew *məqôr*] *of filthy water* which thy father saw, yea, even *the river* of which he spake; and the depths thereof are the depths of hell” (1 Nephi 12:16; see further below).<sup>58</sup> The “fountain of filthy water” constitutes a representation of the devil and his “awful misery”<sup>59</sup> as evident in experiences such as Moses’s temptation: “And it came to pass that Moses began to fear exceedingly; and as he began to fear, he saw the bitterness of hell” (Moses 1:20; cf. Psalms 18:4-5: “The sorrows [cords] of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows [cords] of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented [confronted] me”). Being subjected to temptation in mortality, human beings learn to distinguish good and evil by their own experience: “they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good” (Moses 6:55).

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58. The only other scriptural attestation of the phrase “depths of hell” occurs in Proverbs 9:18 (“in the depths of hell” [*bē’imqê šē’ôl*]). Nephi’s use of that expression appears to represent a similar collocation.

59. 2 Nephi 9:46. Jacob there alludes to his own father Lehi’s descriptions of Satan’s misery. Stated Lehi, “And because that he had fallen from heaven and had become miserable forever, he sought also the misery of all mankind; wherefore he saith unto Eve — yea, even that old serpent who is the devil, which is the father of all lies — wherefore he saith: Partake of the forbidden fruit and ye shall not die, but ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil” (2 Nephi 2:18); “Wherefore men are free according to the flesh, and all things are given them which is expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death according to the captivity and power of the devil, for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:27). Cf. also Mormon 9:4.

Latter-day Saint scholars have made numerous comparisons between Lehi’s family’s journey through the wilderness and crossing of the “great deep” to ancient Israel’s exodus through the Re(e)d Sea and subsequent journey in the wilderness. Lehi’s family would have encountered good freshwater sources, as when they found the river Laman (see Nephi 2:8-9), but also bitter, brackish, or less-than-fresh water sources resembling the waters of Marah (as described in Exodus 15) or “the fountain of filthy water” in Lehi’s and Nephi’s visions. These may have included “large pools of standing water, which remain for months after rare rainfall” in the Arabian wilderness.<sup>60</sup>

### “A Fountain Opened”: The Evidence of *Merneptah*

The Hebrew Bible offers us the evidence of an Egyptian *mr-* name attached to a “fountain” in the context of ritual purification and the natural literary treatment or exploitation of that name. This evidence, then, has potential implications for the name Mormon as attached to the “fountain” where Alma the Elder performed ritual purifications — i.e., baptized his people — and how that name is understood and treated by Mormon himself (see Mosiah 18 and below).

The pharaonic Egyptian name Merneptah (“beloved of Ptah”) came to be associated with a water source northwest of Jerusalem. Moshe Garsiel notes that “this is usually identified as the Lifta spring, and some scholars think that the name was originally Egyptian, *my nptwh* being Merneptah (=מרנפתח), the name of a Pharaoh.”<sup>61</sup> This water source may be the same as the “Wells of Merneptah” mentioned in Papyrus Anastasi III.<sup>62</sup>

The book of Joshua mentions this water source twice: “And the border was drawn from the top of the hill unto *the fountain* [spring or well, *ma’yan*] of the *water* [*mê*, consonantal *my*] of Nephtoah, and went out to the cities of mount Ephron; and the border was drawn to Baalah, which is Kirjath-jearim” (Joshua 15:9); “And the south quarter was from the end of Kirjath-jearim, and the border went out on the west, and went out to *the well* [*ma’yan*] of waters [*mê*, consonantal *my*] of Nephtoah” (Joshua 18:15). The writer of the Joshua texts clearly calques the Egyptian term *mr* (“beloved”) as the Hebrew term *mê* (“waters”), which sounded similar.

60. Warren P. Aston, “Across Arabia with Lehi and Sariah: ‘Truth Shall Spring out of the Earth,’” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 13.

61. Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 150.

62. James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. with supplement (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 258.

Garsiel further points out that the post-exilic prophet Zechariah alludes directly to this name in one of his oracles: “In that day *there shall be a fountain [māqôr] opened [niptah]* to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness” (Zechariah 13:1). Perhaps most significantly, Zechariah prophesied that that this fountain (*māqôr*) — like the waters of Mormon — would be used as the site of ritual purifications. Garsiel notes evident interlingual wordplay on *mr(i)/māqôr* and *n-ptḥ* (“of Ptah”)/*niptah* (“opened”): “In referring to the ‘fountain’ to be opened’ up for ritual purification in Jerusalem as a *mqrw nptḥ*, the prophet [Zechariah] seems to be alluding to the *my nptwh* spring. Moreover, the [midrashic name derivation] comes close in sound to the presumed Egyptian original (compare מקור נפתח, with מרנפתח).”<sup>63</sup> The interlingual wordplay on the divine name Ptah in terms of opened is striking. Perhaps more significantly, however, the Hebrew word *māqôr* (“fountain”) plays on the Egyptian word *mr*, “love.” Although after Lehi and Nephi’s time, Zechariah’s interlingual paronomasia helps us see why Nephi, who knew both Hebrew and Egyptian, saw the “*fountain of living waters*” as a “representation of the *love of God*” (1 Nephi 11:25). It also helps us understand in part why the “fountain of pure water” in the land of Mormon became such an emotive symbol for the Nephites during Alma the Elder’s time until the final years of their society.

### **“Now There Was in Mormon a Fountain of Pure Water”: Righteous “Desires” and the “Love” of God**

The name Mormon enters the Book of Mormon text thus: “And it came to pass that as many as did believe [Alma] did go forth to a place which was called Mormon, having received its name from the king, being in the borders of the land, having been infested by times or at seasons by wild beasts” (Mosiah 18:4). Pending any substantive additional evidence, we must conclude that the king who named this place was king Noah. Mormon then notes that the place “Mormon” was particularly connected with a “fountain”: “Now there was in *Mormon* a fountain [Hebrew construct *měqôr*] of pure water; and Alma resorted thither, there being near the water a thicket of small trees where he did hide himself in the daytime from the searches of the king” (Mosiah 18:5).

Beginning here, Mormon repeatedly describes Alma the Elder and his community as using this “fountain” and its waters for ritual purification. Mormon uses Alma’s baptismal covenant speech to

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63. Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 150.

connect "the waters of Mormon" with the righteous "desires" of those who entered into a covenant with God in those waters:

And it came to pass that he said unto them: Behold, here is *the waters of Mormon*, for thus were they called. And now as ye are *desirous* to come into the fold of God and to be called his people and are *willing* to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light, yea, and are *willing* to mourn with those that mourn, yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, *that ye may have eternal life* — now I say unto you, if this be *the desire of your hearts, what have you against being 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?* And now when the people had heard these words, they clapped their hands for joy and exclaimed: *This is the desire of our hearts!* (Mosiah 18:8-11)

Mormon's inclusion of this speech functionally sets a correspondence between "the waters of Mormon" as a "fountain [cf. *měqôr*] of pure water" and "the pure love of Christ ... [that] endureth forever" (Moroni 7:47). Together with the cultural memory of the waters in Lehi's dream and Nephi's vision of the tree of life, the historical memory of the "waters of Mormon" as a "fountain of pure water" provides the conceptual backdrop to Moroni 7:11: "For behold, a bitter fountain [cf. Hebrew *\*māqôr mar*] cannot bring forth good water; neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water" (see further below).

In his later description of Alma the Elder's church and community in the land of Mormon, Mormon (the editor) offers two statements that show how the "desires" of those baptized into the community in the "fountain of pure water" or "waters of Mormon" were reflected in communal life. Both appear to reflect the meaning of the name Mormon — "love/desire is enduring": "And [Alma] commanded them that there should be no contention one with another, but that they should look forward with one eye, having one faith, and one *baptism*, having their *hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another*" (Mosiah 18:21); "And thus they should impart of their substance *of their own free will and good desires towards God* to those priests that stood in need, yea, and to every needy, naked soul" (Mosiah 18:28). In other words, the community's mutual

“love” and “good desires toward God” gave full expression to the idea latent in the name Mormon as applied to the “fountain of pure water” in which they were baptized, and the land in which they lived.

Mormon also uses “desire”/“desirous” as a leitmotif that plays on the name Mormon in the narratives that chronicle what befell Limhi’s people who were not at the waters of Mormon to enter the baptismal covenant at the time when Alma’s people entered that covenant:

And now since the coming of Ammon, king Limhi had also entered into a covenant with God, and also many of his people, to serve him and keep his commandments. And it came to pass that king Limhi and many of his people *were desirous to be baptized*, but there was none in the land that had authority from God. And Ammon declined doing this thing, considering himself an unworthy servant. Therefore they did not at that time form themselves into a church, waiting upon the Spirit of the Lord. Now *they were desirous to become even as Alma and his brethren*, which had fled into the wilderness. *They were desirous to be baptized* as a witness and a testimony that they were *willing* to serve God with all their hearts. Nevertheless they did prolong the time; and an account of their baptism shall be given hereafter. (Mosiah 21:32-35)

Mormon’s threefold use of the term *desirous* here in connection with the ordinance of baptism deliberately harks back to the covenant that Alma’s people had made at the waters of Mormon, where the term “desirous”/“desire” (cf. Egyptian *mr[i]*) also occurs three times (Mosiah 18:8-11). Moreover, it establishes “desire” in connection with baptism as an important leitmotif within this cycle of narratives. This recurrent repetition of “desirous”/“desire” is in the same spirit as Mormon’s hymnodic, six-fold repetition of his namesake in Mosiah 18:30: “all this was done in Mormon, yea, by the waters of Mormon, in the forest that was near the waters of Mormon, yea, the place of Mormon, the waters of Mormon, the forest of Mormon.”

Limhi’s and his people’s righteous “desire” but lack of baptism and covenant bonds (“they did not at that time form themselves into a church”) emphasize the importance of Alma’s divine authority<sup>64</sup> and the covenant that he and his people had entered into in the waters of Mormon. Their being “desirous to become even as Alma and his brethren” recalls the opening words of Alma’s covenant speech:

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64. See also Mosiah 18:18; 23:16.

"Here are the waters of Mormon. ... And now as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God..." (Mosiah 18:8). When Mormon says that Limhi's people "were *desirous to be baptized as a witness* and a testimony that they *were willing* to serve God with all their hearts" (Mosiah 21:35) he resorts to the language of Alma's covenant speech: "[as ye] *are willing* to mourn with those that mourn, yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as *witnesses of God* at all times and in all things and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, ... now I say unto you if this be *the desire of your hearts*, what have you against being *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" (Mosiah 18:9-10). Mormon's immediate authorial and editorial aim is to highlight similarities between Alma's and Limhi's groups in spite of the lack of divine authority among the latter. But Mormon also has in view the more distant horizon of Jesus's reestablishment of the church at Bountiful (see below).

In due course, Mormon delivers on his promise to give an account of the baptism of Limhi's people. In so doing, he reiterates the "desirous"/Mormon motif anew:

And it came to pass that after Alma had taught the people many things and had made an end of speaking to them that king *Limhi* was *desirous* that he might be baptized. And all his people were *desirous* that they might be baptized also. Therefore *Alma* did go forth into the water and did baptize them; yea, he did baptize them after the manner he did his brethren in the waters of *Mormon*. Yea, and as many as he did baptize did belong to the church of God — and this because of their belief on the words of Alma. And it came to pass that king *Mosiah* granted unto Alma that he might establish churches throughout all the land of *Zarahemla*; and gave him power to ordain priests and teachers over every church. (Mosiah 25:17-19)

Their previous "desires" (or "desirous[ness]") to be baptized and to become like Alma the Elder's people came to fruition. Their "desires" (or "desirous[ness]") continued to match that of Alma's people when they first entered the covenant and formed a church in the land of Mormon. Even though they did not receive baptism at the waters of Mormon, Mormon as editor invokes this name as a paronomastic symbol linking the experiences of Alma the Elder's and Limhi's peoples and the redeeming "love" that

rescued both groups, and the initial establishment of the church to which both groups and eventually many of the Nephites came to belong.

Mormon describes Alma the Younger's further establishment or reestablishment of the church a generation after his father's establishment of that church at the waters of Mormon. His description again echoes those events and the name Mormon: "And Alma established a church in the land of Sidom and consecrated priests and teachers in the land, to baptize unto the Lord whosoever were *desirous to be baptized*. And it came to pass that they were many, for they did flock in from all the region round about Sidom and were baptized" (Alma 15:13-14). Similarly, Mormon's allusive wordplay as a linking motif constitutes yet another testament of the important legacy of the name Mormon as a place name and the covenant-making events associated with the "fountain" there.

At the end of the abridged book of Helaman, Mormon makes another statement that recalls or echoes events associated with the waters of Mormon and their aftermath. Following Samuel the Lamanite's epic sermon to the recalcitrant Nephites of Zarahemla in which he called them to repentance and to live the doctrine of Christ, Mormon records: "And now it came to pass that there were many who heard the words of Samuel the Lamanite which he spake upon the walls of the city. And as many as believed on his word went forth and sought for Nephi. And when they had come forth and found him they confessed unto him their sins and denied not, *desiring that they might be baptized unto the Lord*" (Helaman 16:1). Notably, Mormon only describes the most believing, repentant, and responsive Nephites as "desiring" baptism.

### **"That Which They Most Desired":**

#### **The Waters of Baptism at the Temple in Bountiful**

All of the foregoing prepares us to apprehend the significance of the baptismal scene in 3 Nephi 19 in which Mormon describes the baptism of the disciples that Jesus chose from among the Nephites and Lamanites at the temple in Bountiful. At that time, Jesus reorganized a church that Mormon indicates had nearly gone defunct in the years previous to the cataclysms that attended Jesus's death ("in the thirtieth year the church was broken up in all the land save it were among a few of the Lamanites which were converted unto the true faith; and they would not depart from it," 3 Nephi 6:14). At his appearance at the temple in Bountiful, Jesus began by adumbrating his doctrine (i.e., "the doctrine of Christ," see 3 Nephi 11:21-41). This post-resurrectional teaching included a sermon like the Sermon on the Mount as preserved in Matthew 5-7

(3 Nephi 12–14), and additional teaching that culminated in Jesus healing all the infirmities of the people then present (3 Nephi 17) as well as the first administration of the sacrament among them (3 Nephi 18). Mormon records that the next day, after ministering to an even larger assemblage of people, Jesus's disciples knelt in prayer to God the Father:

*And they did pray for that which they most desired; and they desired that the Holy Ghost should be given unto them. And when they had thus prayed, they went down unto the water's edge, and the multitude followed them. And it came to pass that Nephi went down into the water and was baptized. And he came up out of the water and began to baptize, and he baptized all they whom Jesus had chosen. And it came to pass when they were all baptized and had come up out of the water, the Holy Ghost did fall upon them; and they were filled with the Holy Ghost, and with fire. And behold, they were encircled about as if it were fire; and it came down from heaven. And the multitude did witness it and do bear record. And angels did come down out of heaven and did minister unto them. (3 Nephi 19:9-14)*

And it came to pass that when Jesus had thus prayed unto the Father, he came unto his disciples, and behold, they did still continue without ceasing, to pray unto him. And they did not multiply many words, for it was given unto them what they should pray, and *they were filled with desire*. (3 Nephi 19:24)

Mormon's use of the phrases "that which they most desired" and "they desired that they Holy Ghost should be given unto them" distinctly recalls Nephi's language from his vision of the tree of life. Nephi there describes "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*" as represented by "the tree of life" and "the fountain of living waters" (1 Nephi 11:22, 25; cf. Romans 5:5), in direct connection with the baptism of the Son of God himself (see 1 Nephi 11:26-27).

Moreover, in the context of baptism, Mormon's language distinctly echoes that of Alma the Elder's baptismal speech: "Behold, *here are the waters of Mormon*. ... And now as *ye are desirous* to come into the fold of God and to be called his people, ... *if this be the desire of your hearts*, what have you against being *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 18:8-10). It also echoes the people’s response, “This is *the desire* of our hearts” (Mosiah 18:11).

The Holy Ghost, being “that which [the disciples] most desired” at the time that Jesus reorganized the remnants of the church first established by Alma, had important long-term practical effects for Lamanite and Nephite society for generations afterward. Mormon records, “And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land because of *the love of God* which did dwell in the hearts of the people” (4 Nephi 1:15; cf. again 1 Nephi 11:22, 25).<sup>65</sup>

Mormon’s additional statement that as the twelve disciples prayed to Jesus when he was then present with them “they were filled with desire” affirms the link between “the love of God,” righteous “desire,” and the Holy Ghost. In particular, this statement recalls Mormon’s earlier description of Alma’s covenant community at the waters of Mormon as “filled with the grace of God” (Mosiah 18:16) and matches similar phraseology that he uses elsewhere — e.g., disciples being “filled with this love” (i.e., the pure love of Christ, Moroni 7:48) and he himself being “filled with charity” (Moroni 8:17).<sup>66</sup> It also corresponds to the disciples being “filled with the Holy Ghost” as mentioned in 3 Nephi 19:13 (cf. 3 Nephi 12:6; 26:17; 30:2).

### “Bitter” Versus “the Love of God”:

#### The “Bitter Fountain” Versus the “Good Fountain”

Unfortunately, “the love of God” does not continue to “dwell in the hearts of the people” as described in 4 Nephi 1:15-16. Old ethnoreligious distinctions emerge, including the traditional tribal divisions (see 4 Nephi 1:20, 36-38). These included the broad distinctions Nephites and Lamanites. The latter did not only “dwindle in unbelief and wickedness” (4 Nephi 1:34, 38) — a play on the term “Lamanites”<sup>67</sup> — but “did willfully

65. Cf. also the “tree whose fruit was desirable to make one happy” (1 Nephi 8:10; cf. Proverbs 3:13-18) and “the meaning of the tree” symbolizing “the love of God which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men” which is “the most desirable above all things” and “the most joyous to the soul” (1 Nephi 11:21-23) with Mormon’s description of the people in 4 Nephi 1:16: “and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people which had been created by the hand of God.” On the wordplay involving “happy” (*’aşrê*) in 1 Nephi 8:10 and 1:21-23, see Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and his Asherah,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 2 (2000): 24.

66. Cf. also “filled with the love of God” or “filled with love” (Mosiah 4:12; Alma 38:12; cf. 2 Nephi 4:21).

67. Matthew L. Bowen, “Not Partaking of the Fruit: Its Generational Consequences and Its Remedy,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw*: 240-63;

rebel against the gospel of Christ” (4 Nephi 1:38) and “were taught to hate the children of God, even as the Lamanites were taught to hate the children of Nephi from the beginning” (4 Nephi 1:39).

In the waning days of Nephite society in the 4th century CE, Mormon addressed those Nephites whom he described as “the peaceable followers of Christ” (thus called because of their “peaceable walk” with all “the children of men,” Moroni 7:3-4). In other words, Mormon was addressing those who had not yet fully succumbed to traditional ethnoreligious enmity and hatred, but for whom the temptation to do so must have been a daily struggle. To these, Mormon issued a warning using familiar imagery: “For behold, a *bitter fountain* [cf. Hebrew *māqôr mār*] cannot bring forth *good water*, neither can a *good fountain* bring forth *bitter water*. Wherefore a man being a servant of the devil cannot follow Christ, and if he follow Christ he cannot be a servant of the devil” (Moroni 7:11).

Mormon’s fountain analogy would have recalled for his Nephite audience the very familiar “fountain of pure water” in the land of Mormon, for which he was named and where Alma the Elder’s church was first established. Elsewhere, he informs us: “I am called Mormon, being called after the land of Mormon, the land in which Alma did establish the church among this people, yea, the first church which was established among them after their transgression” (3 Nephi 5:12). The term *bitter* (Hebrew adj. *mār*, plural *mārîm*) recalls the bitter waters at Marah in Exodus 15. The “bitter fountain” vis-à-vis the “good fountain” would have further recalled the “fountain of living waters” in opposition to the “fountain of filthy” water familiar to them from Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision as one of their most important cultural narratives.<sup>68</sup> Mormon’s use of “bitter” here appears to play on his own name in an antonymic, interlingual way involving the idea of “love” (e.g., *mr[i]*).

The Nephites at this stage of their history were becoming — or had already become — like the “bitter fountain” producing “bitter water” rather than producing “good” water like a “good fountain” — e.g., the “fountain of pure water” or the waters of Mormon, and Jesus Christ as the

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Matthew L. Bowen, “The Faithfulness of Ammon,” *Religious Educator* 15, no. 2 (2014): 65–89. See further Matthew L. Bowen, “Laman and Nephi as Key-Words: An Etymological, Narratological, and Rhetorical Approach to Understanding Lamanites and Nephites as Religious, Political, and Cultural Descriptors” (FairMormon Conference, Provo, UT, August 2019), <https://www.fairmormon.org/conference/august-2019/laman-and-nephi-as-key-words>.

68. On Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision as a dominant cultural Nephite cultural narrative, see Daniel L. Belnap, “Even as Our Father Lehi Saw’: Lehi’s Dream as Nephite Cultural Narrative,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw*: 214–39.

“fountain of living waters.” True “Nephites” were supposed to be “good.”<sup>69</sup> Collectively speaking, the Nephites were failing to do the “good” implied in the name Nephi<sup>70</sup> and its gentile derivative Nephites and the “good” in what Nephi described as “the doctrine of Christ” (see 2 Nephi 33:4, 10, 14 in the context of 2 Nephi 31–32). Thus, Mormon seems to have calculated his use of the term “good fountain” as a play on or an allusion to the traditional Nephite self-perception that they were the “good” or “fair ones.”<sup>71</sup>

Mormon’s point was similar to that of James in the New Testament — the Nephites could not have it both ways: “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?” (James 3:11). A fountain can do so no more than a “corrupt tree” can “bring forth good fruit” (Matthew 17:18; 3 Nephi 14:18). The Nephites had seen themselves as “that part of the tree [i.e., the olive tree of Israel] which brought forth good fruit” (Jacob 5:40, cf. v. 45), but seemingly forgot the fate of that branch, namely that “the branch had withered away and died” (Jacob 5:40, cf. v. 45). The Nephites themselves fulfilled that prophecy during Mormon’s time as they tried but failed to “take happiness in sin” (Mormon 2:13), an impossibility.<sup>72</sup>

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69. Matthew L. Bowen, “‘O Ye Fair Ones’: An Additional Note on the Meaning of the Name Nephi,” *Insights* 23, no. 6 (2003): 2–3; Bowen, “‘O Ye Fair Ones’ — Revisited,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 20 (2016): 315–44.

70. Matthew L. Bowen, “Internal Textual Evidence for the Egyptian Origin of Nephi’s Name,” *Insights* 22, no. 11 (2002): 2; Matthew L. Bowen, “Nephi’s Good Inclusio,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 17 (2016): 181–95.

71. Bowen, “‘O Ye Fair Ones’ — Revisited,” 339–43.

72. In Mormon 2:13 (“because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin”), Mormon paraphrases Samuel the Lamanite, whose words hint at the Nephites’ ultimate fate: “But behold, your days of probation is past. Ye have procrastinated the day of your salvation until it is everlastingly too late and your destruction is made sure. Yea, for ye have sought all the days of your lives for that which ye could not obtain. And ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head” (Helaman 13:38). Indeed, the prophetic nature of Samuel’s statement appears to constitute one of the reasons Mormon quotes it, since Mormon takes a keen interest in demonstrating how Samuel the Lamanite’s prophecies come to fulfillment (see 3 Nephi 1:5–6, 9; 8:3; 23:9; Mormon 1:19; 2:10). Samuel the Lamanite, in turn, appears to quote or paraphrase Alma the Younger’s paraenesis to his third son, Corianton: “Do not suppose because that it has been spoken concerning restoration that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you: Wickedness never was happiness. And now, my son, all men that are in a state of nature — or I would say, in a carnal state — are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity. They are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God. Therefore they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness” (Alma 41:10–11).

Mormon knew that resuscitating “the love of God” among his people was key to their temporal and spiritual survival. They were quickly “los[ing] their love, one towards another” (see especially Moroni 9:5 and below). Mormon reminded these Nephites how they remain “Nephite” in the only sense that really mattered, namely, doing “good” and remaining within the covenant: “But behold, *that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually*. Wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth *to do good and to love God* and to serve him is inspired of God.” (Moroni 7:13). In other words, the product of the Nephites collectively and individually as a “good fountain” should have been “good” deeds and a “love of God and all [humankind]” (2 Nephi 31:20). Perhaps it is appropriate that at this point in Mormon’s speech the meanings of the names Nephi and Mormon come together in the context of a fountain metaphor that takes us back to Nephi’s tree of life vision.

**“Charity Is the Pure Love of Christ and It Endureth Forever”:  
Enduring to the End in Love**

Nephi’s identification of both “the tree of life” and “the fountain of living waters” as “the love of God” (1 Nephi 11:21-23, 25) has profound implications for his own discussion of “charity” near the end of his writings (2 Nephi 26). In his midrash of Isaiah 55:1-3, including the invitation “come ye to the waters,” Nephi describes the Lord as always acting on behalf of the human family out of love: “He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world, *for he loveth the world*, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him; wherefore he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation. Behold, doth he cry unto any, saying: Depart from me! Behold, I say unto you: Nay. But he saith: *Come unto me* all ye ends of the earth; buy milk and honey without money and without price” (2 Nephi 26:24-25). Alma interprets the same Isaiah text in terms of Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision when he states: “Yea, he saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and *the waters of life* freely” (Alma 5:34; cf. Alma 47:27).

Nephi’s statement and its connection to the “waters” in Isaiah 55:1-3 also find a strong echo in Moroni’s conversation with the Lord as recorded in Ether 12:33-34: “And again I remember that thou hast said that *thou hast loved the world, even unto the laying down of thy life for the world*, that thou mightest take it again to prepare a place for the children of men. And now I know that *this love which thou hast had for the children of men is charity*. Wherefore except men shall have charity,

they cannot inherit that place which thou hast prepared in the mansions of thy Father.” It is in this same conversation that the Lord explains, “I will shew unto [the gentiles] that faith, hope and *charity bringeth unto me, the fountain of all righteousness*” (Ether 12:28).

Nephi follows up the foregoing statement with what seems to constitute an expansion of Isaiah’s invitation “Come ye to the waters” (*lĕkû lammayim*, Isaiah 55:1) in the phrase “Come unto me all ye ends of the earth”<sup>73</sup> This expansion notably equates the Lord with the “waters” of which Isaiah speaks — i.e., the “fountain of living waters” of 1 Nephi 11. He then proceeds to quote more of Isaiah 55:1 (i.e., “buy milk and honey, without money and without price”).

After stating the Lord’s commandment against priestcrafts, Nephi declares: “wherefore, the Lord God hath given a commandment that all men should have charity, which charity is *love*. And except they should have charity they were nothing. (2 Nephi 26:30). Although undoubtedly Mormon’s quotation of the Hymn to Charity resembles Paul’s use of this text (both may reflect an older, earlier “hymn”),<sup>74</sup> it also depends on Nephi’s earlier description of charity as “love.”

And *charity* suffereth long and is kind and envieth not and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, *endureth* all things. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing; for charity never faileth. Wherefore cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all. For all things must fail; but charity is the *pure love of Christ*, and *it endureth forever*. And whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with them. Wherefore, my beloved

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73. Cf. S. Michael Wilcox, “Nephi’s Message to the ‘Gentiles,’” in *Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 280.

74. See, e.g., Hugh W. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 214–18. The footnote to Nibley’s statement points the reader back to the previous volume in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, see Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 455–56n4; Richard Reitzenstein, *Nachrichten von der königlich Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen* (1916): 362, 416 and (1917 Heft 1: 130–151, and “Die Entstehung der formel ‘Glaube, Liebe, Hoffnung,’” *Historische Zeitschrift* 116 (1916): 189–208; Nils W. Lund, “The Literary Structure of Paul’s Hymn to Love,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1931): 266–76; cf. Alfred Resch, *Der Paulinismus und die Logia Jesu*, in TU 12 (Leipzig, DEU: Hinrich, 1904), 415–19.

brethren, *pray* unto the Father with all the energy of heart that ye may be filled with this *love* which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son Jesus Christ, that ye may become the sons of God, that when he shall appear we shall be like him — for we shall see him as he is — that we may have this hope, that we may be purified even as he is pure. (Moroni 7:45-48)

In the context of Mormon's previous discussion of the "bitter fountain" in opposition to the "good fountain," his use of hope revives Nephi's use of Jeremiah's wordplay on *māqôr* ("fountain") and *miqwê* ("hope," "awaiting"/"collection" of waters, Jeremiah 17:13; 2 Nephi 31:20). Mormon's equation of charity with the "pure love of Christ" that "endureth forever" not only echoes Mormon's own name ("love"/"desire is enduring"), but also Mormon's earlier description of his namesake as a "fountain [cf. Hebrew *māqôr*] of pure water." This latter fountain inevitably recalls both "the fountain of filthy water ... and the depths thereof are the depths of hell" (1 Nephi 12:16; cf. 1 Nephi 15:27-29) as well as "the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life; which waters are a representation of the love of God" (1 Nephi 11:25; cf. the Savior's baptism in 11:26-27). The "fountain of living waters" is Jesus Christ himself and all of the "love" that he embodies.<sup>75</sup>

The description "this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son," asserts a general truth, of course: true disciples of Jesus Christ receive this "pure" and "endur[ing] love" because they "pray" that they may be "filled" with it. Nevertheless, Mormon also appears to allude to the events described in 3 Nephi 19 when Jesus's newly called disciples "did pray for that which they *most desired*; and they *desired* that the Holy Ghost should be given unto them" (3 Nephi 19:9). After these disciples had been baptized, "they were filled with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (3 Nephi 19:13). Mormon further observes that when the disciples prayed to Jesus who was present with them "it was given unto them what they should pray, and they were filled *with desire*" (3 Nephi 19:24). All of this recalls the "love"/"desire" baptism leitmotif from Mosiah (Mosiah 18:8, 10-11, 21, 28; 21:33-35; 25:17-18, 23; see also Alma 15:13-14), including the "love" and good "desires" that characterized Alma the Elder's community formed at the waters of Mormon. Mormon called upon his audience of Nephite faithful to attain to — or re-attain to — the charity or "love" and good "desires" achieved

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75. See especially John 3:16 and D&C 34:3.

by Alma's community and the Lamanites and Nephites to whom Jesus ministered as described in 3 Nephi 11–27.

**“The Gall of Bitterness” vs. “Everlasting Love”/“Perfect Love”:  
The Doctrine of Christ**

Mormon's first epistle to his son Moroni (as preserved by the latter) reflects a situation in which charity or “love” clearly began to fail among the Nephites. With Nephite society on the verge of ruin, many Nephites seemingly were anxious to have their little children, even those who were not yet accountable before God, receive all the ordinances of salvation. This, Mormon declared, did not reflect faith, but amounted to “solemn mockery before God” and “putting trust in dead works” (Moroni 8:25).<sup>76</sup> For him, this practice did not emerge from charity or “pure love”: “Behold, I say unto *you that he that supposeth that little children needeth baptism is in the gall of bitterness* and in the bonds of iniquity, for he hath neither faith, hope, nor *charity*. Wherefore should he be cut off while in the thought, he must go down to hell” (Moroni 8:14). In stating that Nephites who were baptizing little children “ha[d] neither faith, hope, nor, charity” he intimated that they were not “press[ing] forward” on the covenant path and “endur[ing] to the end” as described by Nephi (2 Nephi 31:20). The Nephites, at this stage, were rapidly becoming all that the “bitter fountain” portended in Mormon's sermon. Moroni's inclusion of the phrase “gall of bitterness” in connection with paedobaptism seems intended to show one specific way in which even the heretofore faithful were becoming “the bitter fountain.” Mormon saw the irony: baptism itself symbolizes overcoming the filthy waters of death and the bitterness of hell in which the Nephites had willfully immersed themselves (see below). “Bitterness,” then, constitutes one of the unifying concepts between Mormon's sermon (Moroni 7) and Mormon's first letter to Moroni (Moroni 8).

An even stronger unifying lexical basis for Moroni's adjoining his father's letter to his sermon on faith, hope, and charity is his descriptions of “perfect love,” “charity,” and “everlasting love,” which play on the name Mormon and the latent meaning “love is enduring”:

Woe be unto him that shall pervert the ways of the Lord after this manner, for they shall perish except they repent. Behold, I speak with boldness, having authority from God. And I fear not what

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76. Improper baptism, including paedobaptism as mentioned by Mormon and baptism without authority as mentioned in D&C 22:1-4 “availeth ... nothing.”

man can do, for *perfect love* casteth out all fear. And *I am filled with charity, which is everlasting love*. Wherefore all children are alike unto me; wherefore, *I love little children with a perfect love*, and they are all alike and partakers of salvation. (Moroni 8:16-17)

Mormon's description of divine "love" in his letter to Moroni closely resembles his description of divine love in his sermon (see Mormon 7:45-49). In fact, it appears to constitute a main reason for Moroni's inclusion of both texts. Mormon's description of this love as charity here further echoes Nephi's earlier midrash of Isaiah 55:1-3 in 2 Nephi 26:24-30, 33 and especially v. 30: "the Lord God hath given a commandment that all men should have charity, which charity is love." It is hard to escape the notion that the Nephites viewed Isaiah's invitation "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters" (Isaiah 55:1; 2 Nephi 9:50) as not only an invitation to come to the "waters of life" as a symbol of the "love of God" (1 Nephi 11:25), but also, relatedly, to come into the waters of baptism as a symbol of the Lord's power over Death, Hell, and the devil<sup>77</sup> (cf. the Lord's power over Mot, Sheol, and that old serpent  $\cong$  the Lord's power over Rahab [Egypt], Yamm [the Sea], and Tannin [the serpent], Isaiah 51:9-10/2 Nephi 8:9-10).<sup>78</sup> The "way" through the waters of death made or "prepared" by the Lord (Isaiah 51:10/2 Nephi 8:10; 2 Nephi 9:10) is the covenant "path which came along by the rod of iron, even to the tree, ... and it also led by the head of the fountain" (1 Nephi 8:20) — i.e., the fountain that becomes the fountain of "filthy" (cf. bitter) water (1 Nephi 12:16; 15:26-36; see also 1 Nephi 8:32). The "rod" or "word"<sup>79</sup> that "led to the tree"<sup>80</sup> also "leads" the Moses-like<sup>81</sup> "man [or woman] of Christ" through the Re[e]d Sea-like bitter waters that constitute the "gulf of misery, which is prepared to engulf the wicked" (Helaman 3:29-30).

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77. Daniel Belnap, "I Will Contend with Them That Contendeth with Thee: The Divine Warrior in Jacob's Speech of 2 Nephi 6-10," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture* 17, no. 1-2 (2008): 20-39.

78. See further Matthew L. Bowen, "Messengers of the Covenant: Mormon's Doctrinal Use of Malachi 3:1 in Moroni 7:29-32," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 31 (2019): 125-27.

79. Bowen, "What Meaneth the Rod of Iron?" 2-3.

80. 1 Nephi 8:19, 22; 15:23-24.

81. The image of the "man of Christ" with the "rod"/"word of God" (Egyptian *mdw-ntr*) recalls the biblical image Moses with the "rod of God" (*matṭēh-[hā] `ēlōhīm*, Exodus 4:20; 17:9). See also 1 Nephi 17:26, 29.

Mormon has this covenant path or “way” in mind when he mentions baptism later in the same letter, using what Donald W. Parry calls a “gradational parallelism” or “gradation”:<sup>82</sup>

*And the first fruits of repentance is baptism.  
And baptism cometh by faith  
unto the fulfilling the commandments;  
and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth  
remission of sins;  
and the remission of sins  
bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart.  
And because of meekness and lowliness of heart  
cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost,  
which Comforter  
filleth with hope and perfect love,  
which love endureth by diligence unto prayer,  
until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with  
God. (Moroni 8:25-26; modified formatting mine)*

Mormon’s use of a “gradation” structure here depicts the doctrine of Christ not only as a covenant path but as a “way” with upward steps — an ascent.<sup>83</sup> At the top of that ascent and in the place where we anticipate “charity,” stands a repetition of “love” in the collocations “perfect love” and “love endureth.” The last instance is particularly striking given the Egyptian phonemes evident in Mormon’s name: *mr(i)* “love” and *mn* “is enduring.” The “tree of life” and “waters of life” that represent the “love of God” mark the “end” of the covenant path “when” (and where) “all the saints ... dwell with God” — in other words, salvation and exaltation in the kingdom of God, the final principle of the doctrine of Christ. Viewing the name Mormon in this context helps us appreciate just what this name meant to the Nephites, whose church Alma the Elder initially founded at the waters of Mormon, and what it meant to the men who afterward bore “Mormon” as a personal name (see 3 Nephi 5:12–13; Mormon 1:5).

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82. Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms*, xxvii, 559. Mormon’s son Moroni does something similar in Mormon 9:12-13 and Moroni 10:20-22.

83. *Ibid.*, xxvii. Parry writes: “Many gradation parallelisms have an ascension of expression, from a beginning point to a climatic situation.”

That Mormon has the “cultural narrative”<sup>84</sup> of Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision of that dream in view in all of this finds additional confirmation in his statement: “The pride of this nation, or the people of the Nephites, hath proven their destruction except they should repent” (Moroni 8:27). In the end, the Nephites found themselves, not at “tree of life” or the “waters of life,” but “fallen” like the great and spacious building and its denizens or “drowned in in the depths of the fountain” of “filthy,” bitter waters (1 Nephi 8:32) from which baptism is the symbolic rescue.

### **“They Have Lost Their Love”: *Becoming the Bitter Fountain***

The clear *raison d’être* for Mormon’s faith, hope, and charity sermon (Moroni 7) was diminishing faith, hope, and charity among the Nephites during the time period in which Mormon gave it. Mormon himself states that he had “loved [his people] according to *the love of God* which was in me with all my heart” (Mormon 3:12). Nevertheless, the Nephites were leaving the covenant path *en masse* in contravention of what Nephi taught about the need to endure to the end in faith, hope, and charity in 2 Nephi 31:20. Moroni had included this sermon and the epistle of his father on the futility of paedobaptism and its incompatibility with faith, hope, and charity (Moroni 8) to help his latter-day audience grasp the conditions of apostasy that prevailed in a society and religious community in their death throes. The “love of God” — as embodied in Jesus Christ himself — of which the tree of life and “fountain of living waters” (1 Nephi 11:25) constituted representations in Nephi’s vision, had virtually vanished among the Nephites, as it had existed in 4 Nephi 1:15-17.<sup>85</sup> Mormon’s onomastic wordplays on his own name and “love” in Mormon 7:45-48; 8:16-17; 26 (25-26) echo the language of Nephi’s vision.

Moroni’s stated purpose in writing in his abridged Book of Ether applies equally to his inclusion of Mormon’s sermon (Moroni 7) and epistles (Moroni 8-9): “Wherefore I Moroni am commanded to write these things, that evil may be done away and that the time may come that Satan may have no power upon the hearts of the children of men, but

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84. On Lehi’s dream as cultural narrative, see again Belnap, “Even as Our Father Lehi Saw,” 214-39.

85. 4 Nephi 1:15-17: “And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people. And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God.”

that they may be persuaded to do *good* continually, *that they may come unto the fountain [mēqôr] of all righteousness and be saved*” (Ether 8:26). Moroni’s use of “fountain of righteousness” recalls several scenes from 1 Nephi, including Nephi’s vision of the tree of life and the two fountains. Mormon and Moroni had witnessed in real-time what Nephi had seen centuries earlier in vision. Where Nephi had earlier equated “the fountain of living waters” with “the love of God,” and Jesus Christ himself — whose baptism is described there (1 Nephi 11:21–27) — as the supreme manifestation of that “love,” he directly associates “the fountain of filthy water” with the eventual, violent destruction of his people:

And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the people of my seed gathered together in multitudes against the seed of my brethren; and they were gathered together to battle. And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold *the fountain of filthy water* which thy father saw; yea, even the river of which he spake; and the depths thereof are the depths of hell. And *the mists of darkness are the temptations of the devil*, which blindeth the eyes and hardeneth the hearts of the children of men and leadeth them away into broad roads that they perish and are lost. And the large and spacious building which thy father saw is vain imaginations and the pride of the children of men. And a great and a terrible gulf divideth them, yea, even the sword of the justice of the Eternal God and Jesus Christ, which is the Lamb of God, of whom the Holy Ghost beareth record from the beginning of the world until this time and from this time henceforth and forever. *And while the angel spake these words, I beheld and saw that the seed of my brethren did contend against my seed, according to the word of the angel. And because of the pride of my seed and the temptations of the devil, I beheld that the seed of my brethren did overpower the people of my seed.* And it came to pass that I beheld and saw the people of the seed of my brethren, that they had overcome my seed. And they went forth in multitudes upon the face of the land. (1 Nephi 12:15–20)

Moroni includes Mormon’s sermon and the latter’s use of the analogy of the “bitter fountain” vis-à-vis the “good fountain” at least partly with the bitter end of Nephite society in view. Mormon’s final preserved letter to Moroni describes Nephite mores at the end of their society as the worst of what humanity has to offer: “For so exceedingly do they anger that it seemeth me that they have no fear of death. And *they have lost*

*their love* one towards another; and they thirst after blood and revenge continually" (Moroni 9:5). In sum, they had lost everything that had made them "Nephite": "they delight in everything save that which is *good*" (Moroni 9:19). They had abandoned the "love one towards another" that had characterized Alma's church (Mosiah 18:21) and "the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people" long after Christ's post-resurrectional ministry (4 Nephi 1:15). They had "forsaken" Christ, the "fountain of living waters" (Jeremiah 2:13; 17:13; 1 Nephi 11:25), the embodiment of "the love of God."<sup>86</sup> They had ceased to be — or partake of — that "good fountain" (Moroni 7:11) at all. They had come to embody Zenos's description of the "branches whose fruit is most bitter" (Jacob 5:52, 57) and ultimately fulfilled his prophecy regarding the "that part of the tree which brought forth *good* fruit [cf. Nephites and *nfr*=good], even the branch [that] had withered away and died" (Jacob 5:40).

It is fitting, then, that some of the last words in the Book of Mormon by Moroni pertain specifically to "lov[ing] God" with all of one's faculties:

Yea, *come unto Christ* and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness. And if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness and *love God with all your might, mind and strength*, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ. And if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. 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. (Moroni 10:32-33)

Here, of course, Moroni directly quotes Deuteronomy 6:5: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." Moroni's language also recalls Nephi's paraphrase of Deuteronomy 6:5 in 2 Nephi 25:29: "And now behold, I say unto you that the right way is to believe in Christ and deny him not. And Christ is the Holy One of Israel; wherefore ye must bow down before him and worship him with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul. And if ye do this, ye shall in nowise be cast out" (2 Nephi 25:29).<sup>87</sup>

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86. 1 Nephi 1:22, 25; 1 John 4:9; Romans 5:5; 8:39; Titus 3:4; cf. John 5:42; 1 John 2:5; 5:3; Mosiah 4:2; Alma 13:29; 4 Nephi 1:15.

87. Nephi first uses the collocation "might, mind, and strength" in 2 Nephi 25:29. King Benjamin later uses it in his sermon in Mosiah 2:11, and Moroni will use

This last exhortation from Moroni, like his inclusion of texts from his father Mormon that emphasize the nature and importance of the “love of God,” recommends the “love of God” as the individual and collective solution to becoming “the bitter fountain” and “bring[ing] forth bitter water” (see again Moroni 7:11).

### Conclusion

Mormon, Moroni, and their predecessors evidence an awareness of the paronomastic narrative links in the Hebrew text of Exodus between the name Miriam (Mary) and the “waters” (*mayim*) of the Re[e]d Sea from which Israel is “pulled” and the nearby “bitter” waters of Marah. Nephi sees and recognizes the connection between Mary (Mariam), the mother of Jesus and the “love of God” which “is the most desirable above all things,” and thus to both “the tree of life” and “the fountain of living waters” and the baptism of the Savior (1 Nephi 11:21-27) vis-à-vis “the fountain of filthy water” (1 Nephi 12:16).

Mormon, named for his father, also bore the name of “the land of Mormon” (3 Nephi 5:12). Mormon himself associates his given name with “waters,” first characterized as a “fountain of pure water” (Mosiah 18:5) as well as with the good “desires” and “love” that Alma the Elder’s converts manifest at the time of their baptism (Mosiah 18:8, 10-11, 21, 28). Mormon’s accounts of the baptisms of Alma the Elder’s people, Limhi’s people, the people at Sidom, and those who heard and believed the preaching of Samuel the Lamanite anticipate the Book of Mormon’s climactic baptismal scene in 3 Nephi 19 and reflect back on Nephi’s vision (1 Nephi 11:21-27). When Jesus reorganized or reestablished the church originally founded by Alma, Mormon characterizes their baptism and reception of the Holy Ghost as “that which they most desired” (3 Nephi 19:9-14, 24).

Mormon thus links several baptismal scenes together, beginning at the waters of Mormon, with the term “desire”/“love.” When Jesus’s newly chosen disciples “pray for that which they most *desired*” they not only ask for Holy Ghost as a gift, but for that which “fillet with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer” (Moroni 8:26; cf. especially 3 Nephi 19:24). This scene dramatically recalls the baptismal scene at the waters of Mormon and the righteous “desires” of the people. They recall the “fountain of living waters” who is Jesus Christ himself (Jeremiah 2:13; 17:13; 1 Nephi 11:25-27).

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it as part of his quotation or paraphrase of Deuteronomy 6:5, which Nephi also paraphrases. This combination also occurs in D&C 4:2; 11:20; 20:31; 33:7; 59:5; 98:7.

Mormon's analogy of "the bitter fountain" and its "bitter water" vis-à-vis "the good fountain" and its "good water" helps set up his discussion of "the pure love of Christ," which "endureth forever" (Moroni 7:47-48). This discussion should be understood against the backdrop of Lehi's dream as Nephite "cultural narrative" and the history of Alma the Elder's people at the waters of Mormon. As Mormon's people lose the "love [which] endureth by faith unto prayer" (Moroni 8:26; see also Moroni 8:14-17; 9:5) they become like the "bitter fountain" (Moroni 7:11) and do not endure to the end in faith, hope, and charity on the covenant path (cf. 2 Nephi 31:20; Moroni 7:40-48; 8:24-26). The name Mormon ("desire is enduring" or "love is enduring"), as borne by the prophet-editor of the Book of Mormon, embraces the whole cloud of these associations.

In light of all of the foregoing, we can better appreciate Alma's words to Corianton that "it is also requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works. And if their works were *good* in this life and *the desires of their hearts were good*, that they should also at the last day *be restored unto that which is good*, . . . the one restored to happiness according to his *desires* of happiness — *or to good according to his desires of good* — and the other to evil according to his desires of evil" (Alma 41:3, 5). This is the ultimate reality to which Mormon's "good fountain" and "bitter fountain" point (Moroni 7:11).

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