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## There Is No Beauty That We Should Desire Him

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# THERE IS NO BEAUTY THAT WE SHOULD DESIRE HIM

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Loren Spendlove

**Abstract:** *In two separate passages Isaiah appears to describe the mortal Messiah as lacking in physical beauty and perhaps as even having some type of physical disfigurement (see Isaiah 52:14 and 53:2–4). On the contrary, Joseph, David, Esther, and Judith — portrayed in the biblical text as physical saviors or deliverers of Israel — are represented as beautiful in form and appearance. In fact, their beauty seems to be a significant factor in the successful exercise of their power as physical saviors of Israel. Unlike Joseph, David, Esther, and Judith, Christ may have been foreordained to descend to his mortal state with a less than attractive physical appearance and as someone who experienced illness throughout his life so that “he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12).*

Following his initial rejection by the people of King Noah, “after the space of two years ... Abinadi came among them in disguise, that they knew him not, and began again to prophesy among them” (Mosiah 12:1).<sup>1</sup> During this second period of preaching Abinadi<sup>2</sup> cited many of the words of Isaiah, including:

For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground. He hath *no form* [לא־תֹאֵר *lo-toar*] *nor comeliness* [ולֹא הִדָּר *ve'lo hadar*]. And when we shall see him, there is *no beauty* [ולֹא־מְרֹאֵה *ve'lo-mareh*] that *we should desire him* [וְנַחֲמַדְהוּ *ve'nechmedehu*].<sup>3</sup> He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows [מִכַּאֲבוֹת *machovot*] and acquainted [וּיְדוּעַ *vidua*] with grief [חֹלִי *choli*]. And we hid, as it were, our faces from him. He was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne *our griefs* [חֹלֵינוּ *cholaenu*] and carried *our sorrows* [מִכַּאֲבֵינוּ *machovenu*]. Yet we did esteem

him stricken, smitten of God and rejected. (Mosiah 14:2–4; see Isaiah 53:2–4 KJV)

Although Isaiah’s “man of sorrows” is not plainly identified in the Masoretic text, Abinadi clarified that he was “God himself” who “shall come down among the children of men and shall redeem his people” (Mosiah 15:1). This passage, as rendered in the Book of Mormon and in the KJV translation of the Bible, informs us that Christ would appear bodily deficient in three ways: he would lack form (תאר *toar*), comeliness (הדר *hadar*), and beauty (מראה *mareh*), contributing to his rejection by the people of Israel. While the KJV correctly translates תאר (*toar*) as *form*, it would be more accurate to render הדר (*hadar*) as *splendor* or *majesty*, and מראה (*mareh*) as *appearance*. The modern *New American Standard Bible 2020* (hereafter NASB20) provides a more accurate translation of this passage from Isaiah:

For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground; He has *no stately form* or *majesty* that we would look at Him, nor an *appearance* that we would *take pleasure* in Him. He was despised and abandoned by men, a man of great *pain* and *familiar with sickness*; and like one from whom people hide their faces, He was despised, and we had no regard for Him. However, it was *our sicknesses* that He Himself bore, and *our pains* that He carried; yet we ourselves assumed that He had been afflicted, struck down by God, and humiliated. (Isaiah 53:2–4 NASB20, emphasis added)

David Penchansky expressed that the Hebrew word for *form* (תאר *toar*) “refers to the body, while ‘appearance’ [מראה *mareh*] refers to the face.”<sup>4</sup> So, there was nothing about Christ’s physical form, his outward bearing, nor in his facial appearance that would physically draw the people of Israel to him. In addition, Isaiah adds that Christ would be burdened with pains and sicknesses. By way of allegory, just as Abinadi came among the people of Noah in disguise, it is possible that Christ also came among the people of Israel in disguise,<sup>5</sup> without the trappings of an attractive bodily form, without adornment or majesty, and without any facial attractiveness that would entice the Israelites to follow him.<sup>6</sup>

In Isaiah 52 we are given another description of the future Christ using two of the Hebrew words found above: תאר (*toar*, “form”) and מראה (*mareh*, “appearance”):

Just as many *were appalled* [שממון *shammu*, “shudder, be appalled”<sup>7</sup>] at you, My people, So *His appearance* [מראהו]

*marehu*] was *marred* [משהת *mishchat*] beyond that of a man,  
*And His form* [והארר *ve'toaro*] beyond the sons of mankind.  
 (Isaiah 52:14 NASB20, emphasis added, see also 3 Nephi 20:44)

The noun משהת (*mishchat*), often translated as *marred* in this passage from Isaiah, is only used in one other biblical verse — part of a section detailing the physical requirements for sacrificial animals — where the word connotes some type of physical disfigurement or deformity, rendering the animal ritually unfit for sacrifice:

Nor shall you offer any of these animals taken from the hand of a foreigner as the food of your God; for their *deformity* [משהת *mishchat*] is in them, they have an *impairment* [מום *mum*, physical blemish<sup>8</sup>]. They will not be accepted for you. (Leviticus 22:25 NASB20, emphasis added)

Isaiah 52:14 informs us that Christ would be marred (משהת *mishchat*) — that he would be deformed, blemished, or disfigured<sup>9</sup> — in appearance (מראה *mareh*) and in form (תאר *toar*).<sup>10</sup> Drawing a comparison with Leviticus 22:25, this physical deformity, blemish, or disfigurement could have disqualified him in the eyes of the people as the promised Messiah. While some students of the Bible may understand Isaiah 52:14 as a reference to the physical effects of Christ's scourging by the Romans, or of his crucifixion, it is just as likely a reference to his lack of physical beauty resulting from some type of physical defect during his mortal life.<sup>11</sup>

In his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus “went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read” (Luke 4:16 KJV). Following his reading of a text from Isaiah he explained to those present: “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21 KJV). He then added, “Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself” (Luke 4:23 KJV). Why did Jesus cite this proverb to the people? Was this a public admission of a personal illness or physical deformity? While we cannot be sure of the source of this proverb, it is possible that it was a popular aphorism derived from a passage from the book of Sirach:<sup>12</sup>

My son, in thy sickness be not negligent: but pray unto the Lord, and he will make thee whole.... Then give place to the physician, for the Lord hath created him: let him not go from thee, for thou hast need of him. (Sirach 38:9, 12 KJV)

The proverb that Jesus cited raises the possibility that he had a lingering and observable physical illness or deformity. Perhaps members of the synagogue had publicly expressed confusion over Jesus's

healing of others while he himself appeared to be neglecting his own obvious physical weakness. This apparent paradox may have seemed hypocritical, or even deceitful to them. Later, during his crucifixion, the chief priests, scribes, and elders mocked Christ: “He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him” (Matthew 27:42 KJV). Perhaps members of the Nazareth synagogue were thinking something similar: “He healed others; himself he cannot heal. If he be the King of Israel, let him now heal himself, and we will believe him.”

In this paper I principally focus on two of the Hebrew nouns that Isaiah uses to describe Christ, the suffering servant, as lacking: תאר (*toar*, form) and מראה (*mareh*, appearance). I also explain how these two words are used to positively describe and identify six saviors of Israel, or mothers of saviors, in the scriptures. I also argue that sickness, and possibly deformity, were a lifelong aspect of Christ’s mortal state and were important aspects of his messianic mission.<sup>13</sup>

### Moses — Pattern of a Beautiful Savior/Deliverer

The birth of Moses is briefly described in the Hebrew Bible as follows: “And the woman conceived and gave birth to a son; and when she saw *that he was beautiful* [כי־טוב הוא *ki-tov hu*], she hid him for three months” (Exodus 2:2 NASB20, emphasis added). The phrase translated as “that he was beautiful” is literally “that he was good” in Hebrew. In the Greek Septuagint translation of Exodus the Hebrew word טוב (*tov*) was rendered ἀστεῖος (*asteios*). This Greek word is used only twice in the New Testament, both with reference to the birth of Moses, and generally rendered as *beautiful* or *fair* in English translations:

At this time Moses was born; and he was *beautiful* [ἀστεῖος *asteios*] to God. He was nurtured for three months in his father’s home. (Acts 7:20 NASB20, emphasis added)

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a *beautiful* [ἀστεῖος *asteios*] child; and they were not afraid of the king’s edict. (Hebrews 11:23 NASB20, emphasis added)

Presumably based on this passage from Exodus 2:2, much folklore developed around the physical appearance of the young Moses. Philo, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher from Alexandria who lived during the lifetime of Jesus, wrote:

And when the king's daughter saw that [Moses] was more perfect than could have been expected at his age, and when from his appearance she conceived greater good will than ever towards him, she adopted him as her son.<sup>14</sup>

In *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Flavius Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, added:

God did also give [Moses] that tallness, when he was but three years old, as was wonderful. And as for his beauty, there was nobody so unpolite as, when they saw Moses, they were not greatly surprised at the beauty of his countenance; nay, it happened frequently, that those that met him as he was carried along the road, were obliged to turn again upon seeing the child; that they left what they were about, and stood still a great while to look on him; for the beauty of the child was so remarkable and natural to him on many accounts, that it detained the spectators, and made them stay longer to look upon him.<sup>15</sup>

Both Philo and Josephus portray the young Moses as an exemplary specimen of beauty and childhood perfection. Also, given that Moses is depicted as an ideal prototype of a deliverer of Israel in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon (cf. Deuteronomy 34:10, 1 Nephi 4:2, and 2 Nephi 3:9), these representations of beauty and physical perfection seem fitting. In his seminal work *Legends of the Jews*, Louis Ginzberg wrote that when the daughter of Pharaoh found the ark of Moses among the reeds and opened it, “her amazement was great. She beheld an exquisitely beautiful boy, for God had fashioned the Hebrew babe’s body with peculiar care.”<sup>16</sup> Ginzberg added: “His royal foster-mother caressed and kissed him constantly, and on account of his extraordinary beauty she would not permit him ever to quit the palace.”<sup>17</sup> Joan Taylor explained: “The portrayal of Moses as handsome in ancient biographies and other accounts correlates with widespread expectations in antiquity that a royal ruler should be good-looking.”<sup>18</sup>

Since the scriptural record of the physical appearance of Moses is scant, my sole purpose in discussing his perceived beauty is to help us identify a standard or model by which the ancients likely judged their leaders and rulers. To be a leader, and especially a deliverer, a person needed to be perceived as possessing physical beauty. Even today, multiple studies have shown that physically attractive people are more likely to be perceived as good leaders.<sup>19</sup>

### The Use of תאר *Toar* and מראה *Mareh* in the Bible

As previously explained, the nouns תאר (*toar*) and מראה (*mareh*)<sup>20</sup> are best translated into English as *form* and *appearance*, respectively, especially when describing individuals in the biblical record. While מראה (*mareh*) is used quite frequently in the Bible (103 times), תאר (*toar*) is mentioned only 15 times. When used to describe people, these nouns are generally coupled with an adjective, like *beautiful*, *good*, *bad*, etc. In most biblical passages one, but not both, of these nouns is used when describing a person's physical appearance (see Table 3 in Appendix 1 for a complete list).<sup>21</sup>

For example, in Genesis 12:11 Sarai, Abram's wife, is depicted as "a fair woman to look upon (יפת-מראה *ishah yefat-mareh*)" — more accurately, "a woman of beautiful appearance" — but תאר (*toar*) is not used to describe her. Conversely, Abigail is described as being "of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance (ויפת תאר *vifat toar*)" (1 Samuel 25:3 KJV, emphasis added). More precisely, she is described as having a "beautiful form." In describing her, the author of 1 Samuel used the noun תאר (*toar*) but not מראה (*mareh*). This usage of one word, but not the other, is the most commonly used pattern when describing the physical appearance of individuals in the Bible, except for specific individuals that will be discussed in the following sections.

### Saviors of Israel — Both תאר *Toar* and מראה *Mareh*

As with the description of the future Christ in Isaiah 52:14 and 53:2, in some special cases both תאר (*toar*) and מראה (*mareh*) are used to describe the physical appearance of other biblical figures. In this section I consider four specific individuals: Joseph, David, Esther and Judith (see Table 1). What these four individuals have in common is their identification as saviors or deliverers of Israel, and like the suffering servant in Isaiah 52:14 and 53:2, their physical appearances are all described using the nouns תאר (*toar*) and מראה (*mareh*). However, unlike the suffering servant they are all depicted as having a beautiful form and appearance.

**Table 1.** *Toar* and *Mareh* in the Bible.

Person	Passage	תאר <i>toar</i>	מראה <i>mareh</i>
Joseph	Genesis 39:6	√	√
David	1 Samuel 16:18	√	
	1 Samuel 17:42		√

Person	Passage	יפה תאר <i>toar</i>	יפה מראה <i>mareh</i>
Esther	Esther 2:7	√	√
Judith	Judith 8:7	√	√

In Genesis 39:6 we are told that “Joseph was a *goodly person* [יפה־תאר *yefeh-toar*], and *well favoured* [יפה מראה *yefeh mareh*]” (KJV, emphasis added). A better translation would be: “Joseph was of beautiful form and of beautiful appearance.” In addition to being described as physically beautiful, Joseph is identified as a physical savior of the house of Israel (Genesis 45:7) and of the Egyptians (Genesis 47:25). In fact, as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE Joseph was described by Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, as “a mirror of purity” and characterized as “a type-figure of Christ.”<sup>22</sup> Kristian Heal added that “in early Syriac Christianity” Joseph was seen “first and foremost as a type of Christ.”<sup>23</sup>

As with Joseph, David is described by the author of 1 Samuel as physically attractive. In 1 Samuel 16:18 we are told that David was “a comely person [איש תאר *ish toar*].” איש תאר (*ish toar*) literally means “a man of form,” but perhaps more fittingly, “a well-formed man.” In chapter 17 the author described David as being “of a fair countenance [עם־יפה מראה *im-yefeh mareh*]” (1 Samuel 17:42). This later phrase is better rendered: “with a beautiful appearance.” So, like Joseph, David is characterized as both pleasing of form and appearance. And like Joseph, David is also identified as a type of Christ, a savior of Israel: “Ahithophel was David’s counsellor [*sic*], and he is said to be a type of Judas, and David a type of Christ.”<sup>24</sup> James Hamilton added that “Joseph functioned as a type of David” and that “David functioned as a type of Jesus the Messiah.”<sup>25</sup>

Esther, who replaced Vashti as the new queen of king Ahasuerus, is described as “fair and beautiful [יפת־תאר וטובת מראה *yefat-toar ve'tovat mareh*]” (Esther 2:7 KJV). However, a more accurate translation from the Hebrew would be, “beautiful of form and of good appearance.” Like Joseph and David, Esther is depicted as having a beautiful form and appearance, and she also has been identified as a deliverer of her people. Clayton Fausett expressed that both “Esther and Mordecai depict Christ in His atoning and future Messianic role. Their tandem role for the salvation for mankind is displayed when Mordecai is noted donning sackcloth and ashes, while Esther instead dons royal robes.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Hamilton noted messianic comparisons between the stories of Esther and Joseph:

Like Joseph, Esther is virtually a slave in a foreign land. Like Joseph, she is described as being “handsome in form and appearance.” Like Joseph, she is cleaned up and presented to the king. Like Joseph, she finds favor in the king’s sight. The wording of her resolution is reminiscent of Israel’s words (cf. Esther 4:16 and Genesis 43:14), and like Joseph she makes requests of the king that benefit, yea, deliver the Jewish people from wicked opposition.<sup>27</sup>

Regarding the eponymous book of Judith<sup>28</sup>, the Jewish Encyclopedia states: “As most students of the book have recognized, it was originally written in Hebrew. The standard Greek version bears the unmistakable marks of translation from this language.”<sup>29</sup> One of those “unmistakable marks of translation” from Hebrew can be seen in the depiction of Judith’s physical beauty: “She was also *of a goodly countenance, and very beautiful to behold*” (Judith 8:7 KJV, emphasis added).<sup>30</sup> Since the extant text is in Greek, I provide an interlinear Greek/English translation below, with footnotes from Thayer’s Greek Lexicon:

καὶ	ἡ	καλὴ	τῷ	εἶδει	καὶ	ὡραία	τῇ
And / she	/ good	(טובת <i>tovat-toar</i> ) <sup>31</sup>	/ the / form	(תאר <i>toar</i> ) <sup>32</sup>	/ and / beautiful	(יפה <i>yafeh</i> ) <sup>33</sup>	/ the
	ᾧ	ψει		σφόδρα			
	appearance or sight	(מראה <i>mareh</i> ) <sup>34</sup>		exceedingly.			

Like Joseph, David, and Esther, Judith was both of *good form* (תאר טובת *tovat-toar*) and of beautiful appearance (יפה מראה *yefat mareh*). Additionally, she is strongly identified as a savior of Israel. Robin Branch wrote that Judith’s “beheading of Holofernes, the invading Assyrian general — in his own tent, with his own sword, and surrounded by his own heretofore victorious army, no less — marks her as a political savior in Israel on a par with David.”<sup>35</sup> In fact, Andrea Sheaffer characterized David as the archetype for Judith:

The praise David and Judith receive for their heroic actions of liberating Israel from a formidable enemy seals the evidence that David is an archetype for the Judith story. In 1 Samuel 18:6, the women of Israel come out to meet David with dancing and “with timbrels, and with rejoicing, and with cymbals.” Reminiscent of David’s celebration, all the women of Israel run together to see Judith; they dance and bless her (Judith 15:12), and Judith leads the women in a song of praise to the Lord also with timbrels and cymbals (Judith 16:1). Here we have validation that Judith has fully entered the realm of

warrior, receiving the same victor's welcome as David, and their celebrated accomplishments are identical.<sup>36</sup>

Unlike the book of Esther, which is included in the Hebrew Bible, the book of Judith, although numbered among the books of the Greek Septuagint, was not accepted into the later Jewish canon, the Masoretic text.<sup>37</sup>

### **Beauty as Power in the Bible**

Influenced by Greek thought, our modern civilization is able to experience and describe the world in abstract ways. But to ancient Hebrews the world was conceptualized through a concrete rather than an abstract framework. Greek thought teaches us to interpret the world with our minds, while ancient Hebrew thought, or concrete thought, relied on the five senses to understand the world and its environs. James Faulconer explained:

Unlike the noun in English or Greek, “the action of the Hebrew noun is active, dynamic, visible, and palpable.” Because nouns represent things (whether material things or emotional or conceptual ones, such as feelings), this is also true of the difference between how Hebrews and Greeks perceive things. In Hebrew thinking, things are always visible and palpable. For us, perhaps the most important category of things are the abstract things — such as ideas and concepts — that we use to manipulate the particular entities we deal with every day. But such things are not only not active, they are also neither visible nor palpable. For us the world is the enactment of something static, pregiven, and abstract (whether a Platonic realm or the formulae of physicists), but for the Hebrew mind the world is itself physical activity. Activity in a physical body is the most fundamental category of Hebrew thought.<sup>38</sup>

Since the ancient Hebrew mind conceived of reality in concrete rather than abstract ways, one could say that in the Hebrew Bible physical beauty represents power; or, perhaps more properly, physical beauty begets power.<sup>39</sup> David Penchansky explained:

The Hebrew words translated as “beauty” do not carry the same meaning as the English word. Although some overlap exists, they are not the same. Western philosophers regard beauty as one of the “transcendentals,” along with truth and goodness. In the Hebrew Bible, יפה [*yafeh*] and other corresponding

words are more geared to physical appearance. Although the Western tradition tends to disparage the physical appearance, in the Hebrew Bible a character described as beautiful has power.<sup>40</sup>

As demonstrated in the preceding section, these four physical saviors of Israel — Joseph, David, Esther, and Judith — were all described as beautiful of form and appearance. In other words, they were portrayed as *ideally* beautiful. In fact, this *ideal* beauty factored significantly into all four of these saviors' success.

In the case of Joseph, the text in Genesis appears to create a causal relationship between his physical beauty and his pursuit by Potiphar's wife:

And Joseph was a *goodly person* [יפה־תאר *yefeh-toar*, beautiful form], and *well favoured* [יפה מראה *yefeh mareh*, and beautiful appearance]. And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. (Genesis 39:6–7 KJV, emphasis added)

Regarding Potiphar's wife, Ginzberg wrote: "Like Rachel his mother, Joseph was of ravishing beauty, and the wife of his master was filled with invincible passion for him."<sup>41</sup> However, scorned by Joseph, Potiphar's wife lied about the substance of the story, resulting in Joseph's imprisonment. What appeared to be an unjust and unfortunate outcome at the time actually laid the foundation for Joseph's salvific mission of preserving the entire house of Israel from destruction through starvation.

In 1 Samuel 16:17 we are told that King Saul was looking for a musician to join his court. One of Saul's servants reported that David was "cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a *comely person* [איש תאר *ish toar*], and the Lord is with him" (1 Samuel 16:18 KJV, emphasis added). From this list of attributes we can gather that David's physical attractiveness was a factor in obtaining his position at court. Later, we are told that David's beautiful face (appearance) was one of the elements that caused Goliath to underestimate him. In fact, David's physical beauty<sup>42</sup> assisted in the metaphorical disarming of Goliath: "And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a *fair countenance* [עם־יפה מראה *im-yefeh mareh*, beautiful appearance]" (1 Samuel 17:42 KJV, emphasis added). This disdain for David's youth and beauty led to Goliath's demise, resulting in the Israelites' victory over the invading Philistine army.

Esther, for her part, won the equivalent of an ancient beauty contest that resulted in her being crowned as the new queen, placing her in a position to save Israel from Haman's plan of destruction (see Esther 2:8–9). When Esther realized and accepted that she had “come to the kingdom for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14), she prepared herself, and trusting in the beauty that the Lord had bestowed upon her, she bravely “put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house” (Esther 5:1). Esther's courageous act led to the unraveling of Haman's murderous plot and to the physical salvation of her people. Like David before, Esther saved her people from a formidable enemy.

Just as Esther's beauty gained her access to the Persian court, Judith relied on her physical beauty to gain access to the camp of the Assyrians who had laid siege to the city of Bethulia. As with David, Judith's beauty served as a powerful weapon in metaphorically disarming her enemy. Like David's beheading of Goliath, Judith's beheading of Holofernes led to the flight and rout of the Assyrian army by the Israelites. As a second David, Judith's beauty laid the groundwork for saving the house of Israel from imminent danger and potential annihilation.

### Mothers of Saviors

In addition to the four saviors of Israel discussed above only one other person is described in the Bible as both beautiful of תאר (*toar*) and מראה (*mareh*) — Rachel, the mother of Joseph. In contrast with her sister, Leah, in Genesis 29:17 we are told that Rachel was beautiful [יפת־תאר] *yefat-toar*] and well favoured [יפת מראה] *vifat mareh*]. More precisely, Rachel is described as having a beautiful form and appearance. In fact, Joseph is descended from a line of attractive women. Sarah is described as “יפת־מראה” (*yefat mareh*)” (Genesis 12:11), or beautiful of appearance, while Rebekah is portrayed a little less favorably, as “טבת מראה” (*tovat mareh*)” (Genesis 24:16, 26:7), or of good appearance. It is only Rachel who is described as both beautiful of form and appearance. Perhaps this is appropriate as the mother of one of the most important physical saviors of Israel and as a significant matriarch of the house of Israel.

Even though Rachel gave birth to only two of the twelve sons of Israel, Jeremiah seems to acknowledge her as the matriarch of the entire house of Israel: “Thus says the Lord: ‘A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not’” (Jeremiah 31:15). In this passage it is not Leah who weeps, although she mothered six of the

sons of Jacob, including Judah, or even Leah and Rachel together. Rather, Rachel, the acknowledged matriarch of the house of Israel, weeps alone.

Like Esther and Judith, Rachel had a beautiful form and a beautiful appearance. As the mother of Joseph — a physical savior of Israel and the recipient of the birthright — and as the matriarch of the house of Israel, Rachel is portrayed as a paragon of physical beauty. Because we are dealing in stereotypes, whether Rachel actually was a model of beauty during her lifetime, or whether we would pronounce the same judgment today, misses the point. Any discussion of Rachel’s beauty must be conducted through the worldview of an ancient Hebrew reader and not from our modern mindset. Rachel’s reported beauty was the source of her power — specifically power over her sister, Leah — which she was able to pass on to her sons, and especially to Joseph.

Paralleling the beauty of Esther, Judith, and Rachel is one more woman of extreme importance in the scriptures — Mary, the mother of Christ. Luke tells us that she was “highly favoured [χαριτώ *charitoō*]” (Luke 1:28), which can carry the connotation of *charming* or *lovely*, but she is not depicted as beautiful anywhere in the Bible. Nephi, on the other hand, describes Mary as “a virgin most beautiful and fair above all other virgins” (1 Nephi 11:15). Nephi’s description parallels that used to depict Esther in the KJV — beautiful and fair. From our prior study of Esther we know that she was described as being of attractive form and appearance. Interestingly, Jo Carruthers informs us that “Catholic tradition embraces Esther as a prototype of Mary.”<sup>43</sup> Carruthers added:

The late fifteenth-century carol by James Ryman speaks of ‘Hestere so fayre of face’ as ‘benigne meyde, modere and wyffe,’ reflecting a traditional reading of Esther as a type of Mary in her representation of womanhood in all of its acceptable guises.<sup>44</sup>

With the Book of Mormon’s propensity to closely correspond with KJV English, it is reasonable to conclude that Nephi saw Mary — as Rachel, Esther, and Judith before her — as both beautiful of תאר (*toar*, form) and beautiful of מראה (*mareh*, appearance) (see Table 2). In fact, as the mother of the Savior of the world this description seems both appropriate and even expected.<sup>45</sup> In his article, “Nephi and His Asherah,” Daniel Peterson makes a compelling argument for connecting the tree of life in Nephi’s vision with Mary the mother of Jesus. Nephi describes the tree of life as “exceeding of all beauty” and Mary as “most beautiful and fair” (1 Nephi 11:8, 15). In addition, both the tree and Mary are described as white, which seems to imply purity. Likewise, Lehi describes the fruit of the tree as “white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen”

(1 Nephi 8:11), but neither Lehi nor Nephi describe the fruit as beautiful or visually attractive. These connections can help us visualize the tree of life as a representation of Mary and its fruit as a stand in for Jesus.<sup>46</sup>

**Table 2.** Rachel and Mary.

Person	Passage	תֹּאֵר <i>toar</i>	מְרֹאֵה <i>mareh</i>
Rachel	Genesis 29:17	√	√
Mary	1 Nephi 11:15	√	√

### Jesus — Lacking a Beautiful תֹּאֵר *Toar* and מְרֹאֵה *Mareh*

While physical beauty appears to have factored significantly into the success of the four saviors of Israel discussed above, curiously, the same cannot be said of the true Savior of Israel — Christ. Although it seems paradoxical, Christ's *lack* of physical beauty seems to have played a significant role in his success as the spiritual Savior of the world. If Christ had come with a beautiful form (תֹּאֵר *toar*) and a beautiful appearance (מְרֹאֵה *mareh*) perhaps his mission of spiritual redemption may have failed. Unlike the four physical saviors of Israel discussed in this paper — Joseph, David, Esther, and Judith — Christ's redemptive mission was principally spiritual in nature. He had to fail physically — he needed to be rejected as a physical liberator/deliverer of the house of Israel — in order to succeed in his spiritual mission of redemption from sin; Christ's physical and spiritual rejection, resulting in his crucifixion and resurrection, were necessary and inevitable. While the stories of Joseph, David, Esther, and Judith are centered around physical salvation, Christ's mission was focused on spiritual salvation.<sup>47</sup>

Not only was Christ the exception to this pattern of beautiful saviors of Israel, he appears to be its very antithesis. Penchansky commented:

The opposite of attraction is repulsion. Attraction is primal and immediate, not a result of cognition or considered judgment. Its opposite is equally strong and deep-seated. Aside from Leah, there are few references to unattractiveness or ugliness in the Bible. In Second Isaiah, there is one. The servant of Yahweh

had no form [לֹא־תֹאֵר *lo-toar*] or majesty [וְלֹא־הָדָר *ve'lo hadar*] that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance [וְלֹא־מְרֹאֵה *ve'lo-mareh*] that we should

desire him. He was despised and rejected by others;  
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;  
and as one from whom others hide their faces he was  
despised (Isaiah 53:2–3).

The appearance of the Servant of Yahweh revolts people and drives them away. This response is precognitive, a visceral reaction to sensory stimuli. It runs very deep.<sup>48</sup>

However, the Bible teaches us that our ways are not God's ways (Isaiah 55:8–9) and that God's judgments are not flawed like ours. While our human tendency is to ascribe undue power and influence to those who are physically beautiful, God's judgments are not based on outward appearance (מראה *mareh*):

And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, And He will not judge by what His eyes see [ולא-למראה עיניו ישפוט *ve'lo-le'mareh einav yishpot*], Nor make decisions by what His ears hear. (Isaiah 11:3 NASB20)

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at *his appearance* [מראהו *marehu*] or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God does not see as man sees, since *man looks at the outward appearance* [האדם יראה לעינים *ha'adam yireh la'einaim*, man looks at the eyes], but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7 NASB20, emphasis added)

The gospels record several occasions on which the resurrected Christ appeared to his disciples but was not recognized by them. Even though they were intimately familiar with his physical appearance the disciples were still unable to identify Jesus in his resurrected state. The first of these events involved Mary Magdalene on the morning of the resurrection. Distressed that the body of Jesus was missing from the tomb, “she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and yet she did not know that it was Jesus” (John 20:14 NASB20). According to Luke, “on that very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus.... While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing Him” (Luke 24:13, 15–16 NASB20). Finally, “Jesus revealed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias,... yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus” (John 21:1, 4 NASB20).

How is it that those most familiar with the mortal Jesus were unable to recognize his physical appearance when he appeared to them as

a resurrected being? One obvious answer is that Christ's resurrected body was most likely vastly different in form and appearance from his mortal body. As Paul wrote: "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power" (1 Corinthians 15:42–43 KJV). Our mortal bodies begin their earthly journeys as seeds "sown in corruption ... dishonor ... and weakness." That is, defects, deficiencies, and imperfections are embedded in our genetic code even before the seed is germinated. However, in the resurrection, these deficiencies are removed and reversed. As one who took "upon him [our] infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy according to the flesh" (Alma 7:12), Jesus could not have been an exception to this genetic order.

Given these points, was Christ's lack of physical beauty merely a circumstance of birth, or was it somehow integral to the eternal plan of salvation? Taylor asserted:

But, if Jesus was not good-looking, and perhaps quite the opposite, this could also have been used to make an important theological point, also on the basis of a biblical model. Given that Jesus's kingdom was not of this world, why not show that his body did not fit the standard expectation of a king either? In the writings of the prophet Isaiah the figure identified as the 'suffering servant of God' is not handsome (Isaiah 53:2). As the King James Version has it, 'he has no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him (to be king)'.<sup>49</sup>

As Taylor noted, Jesus is an atypical king. His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), his ways and judgments are not of this world, and even his physical appearance did not seem to fit the worldly demands for a kingly messiah. As the "new Moses" or the "new David" Jesus did not seem to fit the part. Taylor added that although New Testament authors quote extensively from Isaiah 53, they all averted any reference to the physical description of Christ given by Isaiah in verse 2:

But the Gospel writers do not note the lack of Jesus's comeliness either. This is all the stranger because this passage about the suffering servant is much used in the New Testament to explain the terrible end of Jesus's earthly life. John 12:38 and Romans 10:16 cite Isaiah 53:1: 'Who has believed our message?'; Matt. 8:17 has Jesus cite Isaiah 53:4: 'He himself

took our infirmities and carried away our diseases'; Acts 8:32 and Romans 10:16 have Jesus taken as a 'Lamb to the slaughter' (Isaiah 53:7); in 1 Peter 2:24, we learn that 'by his [whip-]stripes you were healed' (Isaiah 53:5) and 1 Peter 2:22 'he committed no sin' (Isaiah 53:9); Mark 15:28 and Luke 22:37 cite that Jesus was 'numbered with transgressors' (Isaiah 53:12)... In none of these is the crucial verse of Isaiah 53:2, concerning the servant's unfortunate physical appearance, considered to be a description of Jesus in the flesh.<sup>50</sup>

This avoidance of Isaiah 53:2 by New Testament writers seems intentional. After all, what could these writers really say on the matter? What benefit would be derived from acknowledging that Jesus was less than attractive, or perhaps even homely? Would pointing out any physical defects help the gospel cause? Early church fathers, however, were not as reluctant to broach the subject:

While third-century Christian scholars like Origen thought Jesus beautiful, Tertullian thought of him as a 'worm'.<sup>51</sup> Many of the writers of the Christian church in the late second onwards used the 'suffering servant' portrayal in Isaiah 53, a passage that included mention of the servant's lack of beauty, as a positive attribute of Jesus. They argued that it explained many things about him, including his ignominious death.<sup>52</sup>

Finally, Taylor postulated what Jesus's mortal body may have looked like:

Nowhere in the Gospels do we have mention of anything about what Jesus looked like, in terms of his facial features, hair, tallness or physical characteristics. The most likely reason for this is that he was average in every way, and there was nothing distinctive about his appearance that it made it worthy of comment. We have therefore explored what we can know of averages at the time of Jesus, largely from excavated bones, and determined then that he would have been about 166 cm (5 feet 5 inches) tall, with olive-brown skin, brown-black hair and brown eyes. He was a man of 'Middle Eastern appearance', whose ethnicity can be compared to Iraqi Jews of today.<sup>53</sup>

### **Ministering unto the People in Power**

The physical beauty of the four deliverers of Israel that we have discussed in this paper seems to be closely linked with their saving power. Although the same cannot be said of Christ, Nephi tells us that even without physical beauty Jesus ministered with power to the people:

And I beheld that he went forth ministering unto the people in power and great glory, and the multitudes were gathered together to hear him. And I beheld that they cast him out from among them. (1 Nephi 11:28)

Even though Jesus ministered “in power and great glory,” he was still “rejected of men” (Isaiah 53:2). But if power was linked to physical beauty in the ancient Hebrew world, as seems to be the case with the other four saviors of Israel, what was the source of Christ’s power, if not beauty? Lehi told his rebellious sons, Laman and Lemuel, that they were guilty of murmuring against Nephi:

Ye say that he hath used sharpness; ye say that he hath been angry with you. But behold, his sharpness was the sharpness of the power of the word of God which was in him. And that which ye call anger was the truth according to that which is in God, which he could not constrain, manifesting boldly concerning your iniquities. (2 Nephi 1:26)

Nephi’s sharpness, that provided a reason for Laman and Lemuel to take offense, was the “power of the word of God which was in him.” This same “power of the word of God” was also in Christ.<sup>54</sup> But this was not his only source of power. Four times in 1 Nephi we are told of the “power of the Lamb,” implying that power was wholly integrated into the person and mission of Christ. Additionally, Nephi, the son of Helaman, informed us that Christ “hath power given unto him from the Father” (Helaman 5:11). Just as Nephi’s brothers were offended by his preaching, Christ was destined to become “a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel” (Isaiah 8:14 KJV). Nephi added:

For the things which some men esteem to be of great worth, both to the body and soul, others set at naught and trample under their feet, yea, even the very God of Israel do men trample under their feet. I say trample under their feet, but I would speak in other words: *they do set him at naught* and hearken not to the voice of his counsels. (1 Nephi 19:7)

Already put off by his lack of physical beauty — considering him to be a “thing of naught” (1 Nephi 19:9) — the addition of the “power of the word of God” that was in Christ led those in power among the Jews to take offense and to reject him completely (cf. Matthew 15:12). It seems that the Jews were not only offended by Christ’s lack of a beautiful appearance, but also by the “sharpness of the power of the word of God,” causing them to reject both the man and the message.

### **Conclusion**

While Isaiah appears to describe the future Christ as lacking in physical attractiveness, the opposite is true of the four physical saviors of Israel discussed here — Joseph, David, Esther and Judith. Concerning David and Judith, Andrea Sheaffer observed:

One of the earliest facts we learn about David and Judith is that they are both beautiful, a detail that is sometimes thought to denote divine favor. In I Samuel 16:12 — David’s first appearance in the biblical text — the initial detail given is that David is “ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome.” This is immediately followed by God’s command to Samuel: “Rise and anoint David; for he is good” (1 Samuel 16:12). Later, in I Samuel 17:42, when Goliath first sees David, he disdains him because he was only a boy, “ruddy and handsome in appearance.” Likewise, in her introduction, Judith is described as “shapely and beautiful” (Judith 8:7), and shortly after the narrator tells us that she is not only beautiful, he adds that, “No one spoke ill of her because she feared God greatly” (Judith 8:8). Later, when Holofernes first sees Judith, we learn that he and his attendants were “all struck by her beautiful face” (Judith 10:23). This juxtaposition between David’s handsomeness and his anointing, and Judith’s beauty followed by the mention of her piety, are indicators that for the authors of these texts, beauty denotes divine favor.<sup>55</sup>

David and Judith, as well as Joseph and Esther, are depicted in the Bible as beautiful and divinely-favored saviors of Israel. The power of all four of these physical deliverers is narratively linked with their physical beauty. As with these deliverers of Israel, Rachel and Mary, the mothers of Joseph and Jesus, are similarly described as beautiful in form and in appearance.

On the other hand, the mortal messiah appears to deviate significantly from this observed arrangement. Unlike many modern portrayals of Jesus as a strong and handsome man, it is likely that the mortal Jesus was less than attractive, or even homely in appearance. He also may have been sickly or deformed in some way. Concerning the mortal Jesus, Alma wrote:

And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind — and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith: He will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which binds his people. And he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities. (Alma 7:11–12)

Alma explained that Christ would suffer pains, afflictions, and temptations “that the word might be fulfilled which saith: He will *take upon him* the *pains* and the *sicknesses* of his people.” This passage from Alma is a clear paraphrase of Isaiah 53:4: “It was our *sicknesses* that *He Himself bore*, and our *pains* that *He carried*” (NASB20, emphasis added).<sup>56</sup> In addition, Alma’s word choice — “he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions” — implies that Jesus enjoyed less than robust physical health, perhaps even being sickly, throughout his mortal life. From these passages we can understand that during his whole life, not just while in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus likely was plagued with illness, infirmity, and perhaps even deformity. But, not without purpose: “that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.” Christ knew what it was like to suffer repeated or protracted illness, to not stand out as the most attractive person in the room, and to even be rejected by his peers. With bowels “filled with mercy” he knows how to “succor his people according to their infirmities” because he has experienced the same.<sup>57</sup> Given a physical body beset with illness, lack of beauty, and perhaps even deformity, the mortal Messiah was scorned and rejected by the House of Israel. But although his physical body was “sown in corruption,” Christ’s resurrected body was “raised in incorruption” (see 1 Corinthians 15:42), becoming “the most handsome of the sons of mankind” (Psalm 45:2 NASB20).

As a possible allegory, the prophet Jeremiah was told to “arise, and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words” (Jeremiah 18:2 KJV). While there, Jeremiah observed the potter

making a vessel, but “the vessel that he made of clay was marred [נשחת *nishchat*]<sup>58</sup> in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it” (Jeremiah 18:4 KJV). The root of the verb used in this passage [נשחת *nishchat*] and translated as “was marred” is נ-ח-ש (*sh-ch-t*). The noun מִשְׁחָת (*mishchat*) in Isaiah 52:14 used to describe the marred body of Christ is derived from the same Hebrew root. It is possible that the original “vessel made of clay” by Jeremiah’s potter represented the flawed, mortal body of Christ while the second vessel typified his perfected, resurrected body.

Jeremiah added: “O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel” (Jeremiah 18:6 KJV). Just as the first vessel was flawed “in the hand of the potter” (בִּיד הַיּוֹצֵר, *be’yad ha’yotser*, more properly “in the hand of the creator”), the potter/creator reworked the clay and “formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him” (Jeremiah 18:4 NIV). As members of the House of Israel, a two fold lesson emerges from this story:

1. As with Christ, the potter/creator will remake our marred, mortal bodies into perfected, immortal bodies; and,
2. Christ — both the potter and the clay in this metaphor — is also able to remake us into unmarred and unflawed spiritual vessels if we are willing to repent, willing to “return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good” (Jeremiah 18:11 KJV).

Unfortunately, the inhabitants of Jerusalem responded to Jeremiah’s plea for repentance in a less than positive way: “It’s hopeless For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will persist in the stubbornness of his evil heart” (Jeremiah 18:12 NASB20). Paul, supplying a better answer, said that having “stripped off the old self with its evil practices,” we need to “put on the new self, which is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created it” (Colossians 3:9–10 NASB20). It is through Christ, our Potter, that we can become reworked vessels, both physically and spiritually. Because Christ has “descended below all things” he also “comprehended all things” (D&C 88:6). In Christ, and his atonement, it’s not hopeless.

## Appendix 1

Table 3 presents every passage in which either ראת (*toar*) or הארמ (*mareh*) is used, but not both, in describing the physical appearance of a specific individual in the biblical text.

**Table 3.** The Use of *Toar* or *Mareh* in the Bible.

Person	Passage	תאר toar	מראה mareh
Sarai, Abraham's wife	Genesis 12:11		√
Rebekah, Isaac's wife	Genesis 24:16, Genesis 26:7		√
Angel who appeared to Samson's mother	Judges 13:6		√
Abigail, the wife of Nabal	1 Samuel 25:3	√	
Bathsheba	2 Samuel 11:2		√
Tamar, daughter of David	2 Samuel 14:27		√
An Egyptian slain by Benaiah	2 Samuel 23:21		√
Adonijah, the son of David and Haggith	1 Kings 1:6	√	
Vashti, replaced by Esther as queen	Esther 1:11		√
A divine being seen in vision by Ezekiel	Ezekiel 8:2		√
A divine being seen in vision by Ezekiel	Ezekiel 40:3		√
Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah	Daniel 1:15		√

## Appendix 2

### תאר Toar and מראה Mareh — Nile Cows

In addition to the seven people described with both תאר (*toar*) and מראה (*mareh*) — Christ, Joseph, David, Esther, Judith, Rachel and Mary — there is only one other occurrence in the Bible in which both of these words are used to describe something — the Nile cows in Pharaoh's dream (see Table 4). During his dream Pharaoh saw “seven well favoured [יפות מראה] *yefot mareh*” (Genesis 41:2) and seven cows that were “ill favoured [רעות מראה] *raot mareh*” (Genesis 41:3). It would be more accurate to say that he saw seven cows of “beautiful appearance” and seven of “bad or evil appearance.” However, when he recounted this

dream to Joseph he revised his choice of words, replacing מראה (*mareh*) with תאר (*toar*):

And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine, fatfleshed *and well favoured* [ויפת תאר] *vifot toar*]; and they fed in a meadow: And, behold, seven other kine came up after them, poor and very ill favoured [ורעות תאר] *ve'raot toar*] and leanfleshed, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt *for badness* [לרע] *laroa*]. (Genesis 41:18–19 KJV, emphasis added)

In this retelling of his dream, Pharaoh told Joseph that he saw seven cows of “beautiful form” and seven of “bad form” (see Table 4). He even provided a flourish at the end by adding that he had never seen cows of such “badness” in all of Egypt.

**Table 4.** The Nile Cows — *Toar* and *Mareh*.

Cows	Passage	תאר toar	מראה mareh
Seven fat cows from Pharaoh's dream	Genesis 41:2		√
Seven fat cows from Pharaoh's dream	Genesis 41:18	√	
Seven thin cows from Pharaoh's dream	Genesis 41:3		√
Seven thin cows from Pharaoh's dream	Genesis 41:19	√	

Rather than representing saviors of Israel or their mothers, we are told that the Nile cows in Pharaoh's dream were symbolic of the seven years of plenty and seven years of famine that were to befall the region. But, is there possible additional symbolism in this usage?<sup>59</sup>

The seven good cows were beautiful of תאר (*toar*), beautiful of מראה (*mareh*), and fat [בריאת] *briot*], seemingly ideal characteristics in livestock. On the other hand, the undesirable cows had a bad or evil תאר (*toar*) and מראה (*mareh*), as well as being [דקות] *daqot*], meaning small or thin. The two groups of cows appear archetypal in their descriptions.<sup>60</sup> Since the interpretation of the dream of the Nile cows is portrayed as the turning point of the Joseph story, it is possible that the cows serve to establish the idea that *beauty* of form and appearance is synonymous with *good*, while a *bad* form and appearance is tantamount to *evil*. This standard, then, helps reinforce Joseph's role as a physical savior of Israel. It also became the new standard to describe later saviors of Israel. While not all biblical deliverers are described as beautiful of form and appearance,<sup>61</sup>

this physical beauty was apparently remarkable in those outlined in this paper, perhaps for the very reason that physical beauty was a significant factor in the role they played as saviors of Israel. The notable exception to this standard, of course, is Christ who is described as without an attractive form or appearance.

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### Endnotes

- 1 All Book of Mormon citations are from Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).
- 2 Many Latter-day Saint authors have observed that Abinadi served as a type and shadow of Christ. For example, Elder Holland wrote: “But surely the most sublime, the lengthiest and most lyrical declaration of the life, death, and atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ is that found in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, quoted in its entirety in the Book of Mormon by Abinadi as he stood in chains before King Noah. Abinadi was, of course, a prefiguration, a type and shadow of the Savior, a fact that makes his moving tribute to Christ even more powerful and poignant (if that is possible) than when Isaiah wrote it.” Jeffery R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 89.
- 3 The verb נחמדֵהוּ (*nechmedehu*), translated as “we should desire him” in the KJV is derived from the root ה-מ-ה meaning *to desire* or *to take pleasure in*. See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, ND: Brill, 2001), 2946. Hereafter cited as *HALOT*. The noun חמד (*chemed*), also derived from the same root, means *loveliness* or

*beauty* (see HALOT, 2947). So, perhaps a better translation than “we should desire him” would be “we should find beauty in him,” or as the New American Standard Bible 1995 (NASB95) translation renders it: “we should be attracted to Him.”

- 4 David Penchansky, “Beauty, Power, and Attraction: Aesthetics and the Hebrew Bible,” in Richard J. Bautch and Jean-François Racine, eds., *Beauty and the Bible: Toward a Hermeneutics of Biblical Aesthetics* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 52.
- 5 “In some ways, Abinadi’s disguise may also be symbolic of Jesus Christ and His earthly ministry. To King Noah and his priests, Abinadi quoted prophecies that the Messiah Himself would be unrecognizable to His people because He would appear as an ordinary man. He would have ‘no form nor comeliness’ or ‘beauty that we should desire him’ (Mosiah 14:2; cf. Isaiah 53:2). Instead, he would be ‘despised’ because the people ‘esteemed him not’ (v. 3). As recorded in the gospel of John, Jesus Christ ‘was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world *knew him not*’ (John 1:10, emphasis added). Similarly, Abinadi ‘came among [the people] in disguise, that they *knew him not*’ (Mosiah 12:1, emphasis added).” “Why Did Abinadi Use a Disguise?,” KnoWhys, Book of Mormon Central, May 8, 2017, <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/why-did-abinadi-use-a-disguise>.
- 6 “As a true human being, Christ had a physical appearance on earth that lacked ‘beauty.’ Interesting questions have been raised about Christ’s pre- and postresurrection physical appearance. While passages like Isaiah 53:2 may convince us that Jesus was not a beautiful person while on earth, many early church fathers (e.g., Tertullian, Origen, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Augustine) argued otherwise, based on Psalm 45:2: ‘You are the most handsome of the sons of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever.’ There is, I believe, an obvious difference between Christ’s states of humiliation and exaltation, which would entail a change in his physical appearance. While his glory was veiled in his state of humiliation, the resurrection transformed his physical appearance in his exalted state to make him ‘the most handsome’ of men.” Mark Jones, *God Is: A Devotional Guide to the Attributes of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 162–63.
- 7 HALOT, 1563.
- 8 HALOT, 556.

- 9 The New International Version (NIV) renders this verse: “Just as there were many who were appalled at him — his appearance was so *disfigured* beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness” (emphasis added).
- 10 Margaret Barker has pointed out a variant spelling of Isaiah 52:14 in the Great Isaiah Scroll (GIS) from Qumran. Rather than the word מִשְׁחַת (*mishchat*, from the root ח-ח-ש *sh-ch-t*) as found in the Masoretic Text (MT), meaning *marred* or *disfigured*, the GIS has מִשְׁחַחִי (*meshachti*), which Barker interprets as *he was anointed* (from the root ח-ש-ח *m-sh-ch*). So, rather than the NASB20 translation of Isaiah 52:14, “His appearance was marred [מִשְׁחַת *mishchat*] beyond that of a man,” Barker suggests “he was *anointed* [מִשְׁחַחִי *meshachti*] beyond human semblance.” One problem with Barker’s interpretation is that מִשְׁחַחִי (*meshachti*), if understood to be from the root ח-ש-ח (*m-sh-ch*), represents the first person, common, perfect form of the verb. As such, מִשְׁחַחִי (*meshachti*) would be rendered *I anointed* (see 2 Samuel 12:7) rather than *he was anointed*, which would more properly be represented by נִמְשַׁח (*nimshach*) (see 1 Chronicles 14:8). In addition, neither the LXX nor the Targum Jonathan give any indication of the servant being *anointed*. Finally, the Israel Museum’s website has: “so was *he marred* [from the root ח-ח-ש *sh-ch-t*] in his appearance, more than any human.” “English Translations of the Book of Isaiah,” The Digital Dead Sea Scrolls, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, <http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/chapters>. See Margaret Barker, *Temple Mysticism: An Introduction* (London: SPCK Publishing, 2011), 155–57.
- 11 “His visage was so marred ... — The words conflict strangely with the type of pure and holy beauty with which Christian art has made us familiar as its ideal of the Son of Man. It has to be noted, however, that the earlier forms of that art, prior to the time of Constantine, and, in some cases, later, represented the Christ as worn, emaciated, with hardly any touch of earthly comeliness, and that it is at least possible that the beauty may have been of expression rather than of feature or complexion, and that men have said of Him, as of St. Paul, that his ‘bodily presence was weak’ (2 Corinthians 10:10).” Charles J. Ellicott, ed., *An Old Testament Commentary for English Readers* (London: Cassell & Company, 1884), 4:549.

- 12 The Book of Sirach — also called 1. *The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach*; 2. *The Wisdom of Sirach, Book of Sirach, Ben Sira*; or 3. *The Book of Ecclesiasticus* — was one of the books of the Septuagint. This book was included in the Latin Vulgate and was counted among the apocryphal books of the KJV.
- 13 I do not consider the Hebrew word הָדָר (*hadar*) in this paper because other than God himself no specific individual is described using this word in the Hebrew Bible.
- 14 Philo, *On the Life of Moses*, 1.5.19, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/yonge/book24.html>.
- 15 Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 2.9.6, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2848/2848-h/2848-h.htm>.
- 16 Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 1:478.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 1:481.
- 18 Joan E. Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like?* (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 8.
- 19 Jenna Goudreau, “Why Attractive People Are More Likely to Be Leaders,” *Business Insider*, 26 September 2013, <https://www.businessinsider.com/why-attractive-people-are-more-likely-to-be-leaders-2013-9>.
- 20 The root of the noun מָרָה (*mareh*) is ר-א-ה, meaning *to see*.
- 21 Table 3 (Appendix 1) presents every biblical passage in which either תָּאָר (*toar*) or מָרָה (*mareh*) is used, but not both, in describing the physical appearance of a specific individual.
- 22 Ambrose, *Seven Exegetical Works*, trans. Michael P. McHugh, The Fathers of the Church Patristic Series (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 188.
- 23 Kristian S. Heal, “Joseph as a Type of Christ in Syriac Literature,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2002): 29, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/joseph-as-a-type-of-christ-in-syriac-literature/>.
- 24 “The Inward Life of a Real Christian,” *The Earthen Vessel: and Christian Record*, 2 October 1865, 293, [https://www.google.com/books/edition/The\\_Earthen\\_Vessel\\_and\\_Christian\\_Record/AC8EAAAQAQAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=RA3-PA293&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Earthen_Vessel_and_Christian_Record/AC8EAAAQAQAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=RA3-PA293&printsec=frontcover).

- 25 James M. Hamilton, “Was Joseph a Type of the Messiah?: Tracing the Typological Identification between Joseph, David, and Jesus,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 4 (2008): 52, 53.
- 26 L. Clayton Fausett, “Evidence for a Typology of Christ in the Book of Esther,” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 2020), 268, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/8654>.
- 27 Hamilton, “Was Joseph a Type?,” 71.
- 28 Much gratitude to my wife, Tina, for encouraging me to consider Judith in this analysis of saviors of Israel.
- 29 Crawford Howell Toy and Charles C. Torrey, “Judith, Book of,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1907), 7:389, <https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/9073-judith-book-of>.
- 30 “Judith is beautiful; that is a necessary characteristic in a heroine.” Sidnie White Crawford, “Esther and Judith: Contrasts in Character,” in Leonard Greenspoon and Sidnie White Crawford, eds., *The Book of Esther in Modern Research* (London: T&T Clark International, 2003), 73.
- 31 “καλός, -ή, -όν (probably primarily ‘sound,’ ‘hale,’ ‘whole;’, ... Sept. for יפה beautiful, but much more often for טוב good.” Joseph Thayer, ed., *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Company, 1889), 322.
- 32 “εἶδος, -ους, τό, in Sept. chiefly for מראה and תאר; prop. that which strikes the eye, which is exposed to view; 1. *the external appearance, form, figure, shape.*” Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 172.
- 33 “ῥαῖος, -α, -ον (from ῥα, ‘the bloom and vigor of life,’ ‘beauty’ in the Grk. writ.” Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 680.
- 34 “ὄψις, -εως, ἡ, ... Sept. chiefly for מראה; and 1. seeing, sight. 2. face, countenance.... *the outward appearance, look.*” Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 471.
- 35 Robin Gallaher Branch, “Judith: A Remarkable Heroine,” *Bible History Daily*, 5 September 2021, <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/people-in-the-bible/judith-a-remarkable-heroine/>.
- 36 Andrea M. Sheaffer, “Judith Versus Goliath? Visualizing David as Archetype,” *ARTS: The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies*

25, no. 3 (2014), <https://www.societyarts.org/judith-versus-goliath-visualizing-david-as-archetype.html>.

- 37 It should be noted that the book of Judith is still included in the Catholic Bible, although it is considered deuterocanonical. Why was the book of Judith excluded from the Hebrew Bible? According to Sidnie Crawford, patriarchal politics helped determine the outcome: “The character of Judith herself made the patriarchal societies forming the canons uncomfortable, so uncomfortable that she was excluded from the Jewish canon without a fight, while in Christian circles a lot of interpretation took place to allay this discomfort.... Judith subverts the patriarchal social order of the period.” As a rich, beautiful, confident, faithful, childless, and heroic widow, “in spite of her reputation for piety, Judith’s conduct undercuts the patriarchal order,” so she was deemed too dangerous to be included in the Hebrew Bible. Crawford, “Esther and Judith,” 70, 73, 74.
- 38 James E. Faulconer, “Scripture Study: Tools and Suggestions,” *Maxwell Institute Publications* (1999), 69. <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/69>.
- 39 “In Western philosophical and theological discourse, the word ‘beauty’ (and its equivalents) refers to human beauty, divine beauty, and natural beauty. However, the ancient Israelites had two entirely different categories of what might be understood as aesthetic appreciation, employing different sets of words. If one takes these distinct Hebrew words and assumes that all of the words may reside in a larger category such as beauty or aesthetics, then one also lays down a heavy interpretive grid that forces many disparate concepts into the same anachronistic categorical space.... יָפֵה [yafeh] is the word most commonly used for human beauty.... It never describes God.” Penchansky, “Beauty, Power, and Attraction,” 52.
- 40 Ibid., 47.
- 41 Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 352.
- 42 “The Hebrew term יָפֵה [yafeh] does not refer to God but is rather a unisex adjective that refers to both men and women.... We look in vain to find anything feminizing or demeaning in the word when it refers to men.” Penchansky, “Beauty, Power, and Attraction,” 54.

- 43 Jo Carruthers, *Esther through the Centuries* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 13.
- 44 Ibid., 112.
- 45 The Bible is silent on the physical characteristics of the mothers of David, Esther or Judith.
- 46 Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 2 (2000): 16–25, 80–81.
- 47 Rather than a Messiah to redeem them from their fallen state, from their sins, the Jews at the time of Jesus were expecting a Davidic warrior king, a liberator to free them from foreign nations. See Gerbern S. Oegema, *The Anointed and His People: Messianic Expectations from the Maccabees to Bar Kochba* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).
- 48 Penchansky, “Beauty, Power, and Attraction,” 51.
- 49 Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like?*, 12–13.
- 50 Ibid., 13.
- 51 “How much less man, that maggot, And the son of man, that worm ” (Job 25:6 NASB95).
- 52 Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like?*, 193.
- 53 Ibid., 194.
- 54 More importantly, Christ is the very “Word of God” himself. See Loren Blake Spendlove, “The Word of the Lord as a Metonym for Christ,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 49 (2021): 137–66, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-word-of-the-lord-as-a-metonym-for-christ/>.
- 55 Sheaffer, “Judith Versus Goliath?”
- 56 The English translation of Abinadi’s citation of Isaiah 53:4 (see Mosiah 14:4) aligns word for word with the KJV text. חֲלֵינוּ (*cholaenu*) is translated as “our griefs” and מַכּוֹבֵינוּ (*machovenu*) is translated as “our sorrows,” both of which are less than adequate translations of these Hebrew nouns. However, in Alma’s paraphrase of the same passage from Isaiah (see Alma 7:11) the English of the Book of Mormon renders these same nouns as “sicknesses” and “pains,” a much better translation from the Hebrew, and in agreement with

many modern Bible translations (for example, NASB20, NET, and YLT translations).

- 57 The word translated as *succor* in the Hebrew Bible is עֲזָרָה (*azar*, meaning *help*). Christ, our Ebenezer (אֶבֶן הָעֲזָרָה *even ha'azer*, meaning *the stone of help*) is always ready to succor us in our infirmities, whatever they may be.
- 58 English translations render the Hebrew word נִשְׁחָת (*nishchat*) in varying ways. For example: *spoiled* (NASB20), *flawed* (CSB), *something wrong* (NET).
- 59 Some have interpreted the cows as representations of the Egyptian goddess Hathor, something easily recognizable to Pharaoh. See Stephen Newman, “Pharaoh’s Dreams: An Extended Interpretation,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2012): 253–54, [https://jbqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/404/jbq\\_404\\_PharaohsDream.pdf](https://jbqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/404/jbq_404_PharaohsDream.pdf).
- 60 It is possible that Isaiah was referring to the appearance of the Nile cows when he prophesied of the future destruction and captivity of Israel: “And in that day it shall come to pass, that the glory of Jacob shall be made thin [יִדָּל *yidal*], and the fatness [וּמִשְׁמָן *u'mishman*] of his flesh shall wax lean [יִרְזַח *yerazeh*]” (Isaiah 17:4 KJV, emphasis added).
- 61 For example, we are not given any physical descriptions of Deborah, Gideon, or Jephthah.