
Preface

Inspiration, Writing, and Life

As an introduction to the four essays in this book, I would like to give some background so their origin will be known. I feel the Lord has blessed me with some wonderful experiences in life, and those experiences sometimes carried seeds that germinated and grew into essays that required considerable research. In some cases, I received specific impressions that I should put in writing the inspiration that came from them. I will discuss each essay separately, as they were published as journal articles and a book chapter by the Interpreter Foundation. This summary is based on an interview that was recorded, hence the conversational style.

When I now consider together the essays that were written over a long period, I can see certain things that each contributes to a better understanding. I am especially impressed that the Final Judgment by the Lord Jesus Christ, as presented in the first essay, is most important. The other essays help us see how Joseph Smith, in his experience, example, and scriptures, has shown much to greatly improve our understanding and to so live as to help us to prepare for that Judgment. Above all, his restoration

of the temple, with its teachings and covenants, provides important guidance. This explains the title given this volume.

ORIGIN OF “THE CRUCIFIXION AS A MOCKERY, WITNESS, AND WARNING OF THE JUDGMENT”

I grew up in Logan, Utah, and, after my mission in England, I returned to finish my master’s degree at Utah State University. Later, I went to Columbia University in New York to continue my graduate studies. On Sundays, I attended Manhattan Ward.

One Sunday afternoon, I was in my little dormitory room reading in the New Testament. I was reading the account of the Crucifixion. And as I read the account where it mentioned the two thieves, the one on his right hand and the other on his left, I recall very vividly that I was aware of a presence in the room with me. I couldn’t see him, but his voice was very clear, and I was very certain that he was there.

He spoke to me in a kindly voice. He wasn’t criticizing me; he was blessing me. He said, “George, there’s something I want you to understand. And *always* remember”—he stressed that—“that when the two thieves are described by the Gospel writers, the one on his right hand, and the other on his left, that that is the language and the imagery of the Judgment.” Then he left me to ponder the significance of that interpretation.

Well, I was just overwhelmed with the happening. In my imagination, I could see in the Crucifixion the Lord on the cross with the two thieves. And I said to myself, “That’s exactly what’s happening. What I’m looking at is a mockery of the Final Judgment scene when I look at the Crucifixion.”

As I considered those two thieves, I could see that one was repentant, and the other was the opposite. Christ was being mocked with the very symbols of His authority: a crown of thorns instead of the crown of the righteous, a reed instead of a scepter, and other things like that. In every way He’s being mocked. It just overwhelmed me.

That evening, I went to church. After sacrament meeting, I spoke to a friend of mine who was very well acquainted with the scriptures. I didn’t tell him my experience. Instead, I told him the interpretation, putting it this way: “Among all the other things we know about the Crucifixion, we also ought to look at it as a scene of judgment.” He looked surprised. “Why

didn't I think of that before? That ought to be the most obvious thing about it," he said.

Well, that started me thinking, and I wanted to know more about it. So, I skipped all my studies that week at Columbia, and I went up to Union Theological Seminary, which was close by. They had a great library of theological books and Columbia had reciprocal library privileges with them. I spent the week looking at New Testament commentaries. I didn't know, but I thought that since there are many of those, maybe this idea is out there somewhere. But during that week I could not find anyone that had that interpretation. I felt that, at best, it was not widely understood. At the end of the week, I was pondering. I went in the Seminary reading room and I picked up a current theological journal. I can't remember now what it was. But it had an article there about the newly found *Gospel of Philip*. And it had something in there that I thought was related to this idea.

So, I got thinking to myself some more, "Well, who in the Church can I talk to who would be knowledgeable about such things?" And I thought of Brother Hugh Nibley, a professor at Brigham Young University, whose articles in the *Improvement Era* I had been very much interested in over the years. I wrote him a letter about it. I didn't tell him my experience. I was just asking him, "What do you think of this?"

I still have his reply.¹ It starts out this way. It says, "Dear Brother Mitton, Your letter is not only interesting, it is exciting." That's the way that letter starts. He identified some ancient writings that might be related to this, and an important passage from the Book of Mormon that is related. After that, I realized all the more that this was something very important, but I didn't know what my responsibility was with it. What was I supposed to do?

I did know that in my patriarchal blessing, there was a passage that said that I had a work to do in helping to establish the word of God. I had often wondered what that meant, and what opportunities would eventually come to me. So, as I went through life in my various activities, I always tried to be doing something about studying these things.

Late in life I decided I had better try to write up what I've learned about the Crucifixion. When I wrote it and submitted it to the *Interpreter* journal, I used this title, "The Crucifixion as a Mockery, Witness, and Warning of

1. Hugh Nibley to George L. Mitton, January 8, 1966.

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY
 PROVO, UTAH
 84601



ERNEST L. WILKINSON, PRESIDENT

COLLEGE OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

Jan. 8, 1966

Dear Bro. Mitton,

Your letter is not only interesting, it is exciting. For some years I have been putting aside quotations, especially from Coptic sources, on the aspect of the crucifixion to which you refer—as a two-way judgment. Particularly interesting is the frequent early reference to what was later misunderstood as "the sign of the cross" as a sign of the crucifixion, a mark in the palm of the hand and on the wrist: there are a great many references to this, but I have never seen a study on it. I wrote a long preliminary study to the doctrines and ordinances taught by the Lord to the Apostles after the resurrection, which was accepted for publication two years ago but has not yet appeared: and now the new documentary finds are overtaking my study—fortunately only to confirm it. Note that the newly-found Coptic Ms. of which you sent me a notice, contains teachings to the ^{apostles} ~~apostles~~ delivered "after the crucifixion and resurrection..." all of which teachings were kept very secret by the Church. I hope you stay hot on the trail of these things—it is very easy for the world to forget its old idols and disown its own past whenever that is expedient, but back in 1836 in a letter of the First Presidency the Latter-day Saints were told that the Lord required them to keep a careful record of these things, so that both credit and blame might be properly placed in the future. It is a great comfort to know that I am not alone. We must talk more of these strange things.

Yours truly,

Hugh Nibley

Figure 1. 8 January 1966 letter from Hugh Nibley to George Mitton.

the Judgment.” I think if you have this idea in mind, it gives you all those things. It mocks the Lord, but it also is a witness that He’s the judge. It’s also a warning there will come a judgment time. And over the years when I’ve mentioned this idea to people, some of them reacted the same way that the one brother did. They were really surprised. It just startled them. And I realized that once you have this idea, you will never think of the Crucifixion again without being reminded that there’s a judgment coming.

I also realized that it’s related to things in the temple. In the article, I quote a passage from Brother Nibley where he speaks of the Crucifixion as a *two-way judgment*, as described in the Book of Mormon. This is a very important concept: We judge the Lord and act out accordingly in this life what we’re going to do in relation to Him. Later we will stand before Him in judgment. And there are things in the temple ritual that symbolize this two-way judgment.

At any rate, it’s a very, very important concept. And I believe that sooner or later everyone that ever passes through this mortal life will understand that concept: that in the Crucifixion, He suffered much to show these truths to us, and to warn us of what’s coming. Many will relearn that in the life to come; that’s why we do work for the dead in our temples. But it’s going to be something that will be put before everyone somehow, sooner or later.

I think the concept of the arms of mercy and judgment is important. When Jesus holds His arms out, He can be holding out arms of mercy or arms of judgment. It can be either way. And we’re going to be faced with that at the time of our own judgment. Each one of us will be judged by Him.

I also thought it remarkable that a particular article should appear in the *New York Times* at the *same time* I was pondering these things and writing Brother Nibley. It reported on a newly found Christian writing in Egypt that says,

Rise up, rise up, O holy cross,
And lift me, O cross,
I shall mount upon you, O cross
They shall hang me upon you as
A witness to them.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1965.

Old Coptic MS. Unearthed Near Abu Simbel

Prayer Book, Put at 10th Century, Found at Monastery Ruin

By SANKA KNOX

One of the last treasures to be snatched from the rising waters behind Egypt's new High Dam at Aswan is an ancient Christian prayer book, recovered from the ruins of a monastery about 10 miles south of the temple of Abu Simbel.

The book, 17 pages of parchment in almost perfect condition -- its Coptic characters are completely legible -- was brought out just ahead of its certain destruction by the rising waters of Lake Nasser.

The rescuers are scholars of the University of Chicago Oriental Institute, which for five years has been salvaging treasures over a 350-mile area. The great monuments at Abu Simbel are being removed to an island in Nasser Lake through funds and efforts of many nations.

Copies Made for Study

The book, considered one of the great finds of the salvage operation, is now in Egypt. It was photographed and sent to the institute for study and translation. The masses of material found previously have been shared by Egypt and the institute, but the fate of the little prayer book has not yet been settled.

The book, in two parts, is thought to be of the 10th century, and is entitled "The Word of Our Savior and Our Master Jesus the Christ to the Apostles Before He was Raised to Heaven." Part one relates a conversation among Jesus, Peter and the other apostles after the crucifixion and resurrection and before the ascen-



Page, with Coptic characters, from the Christian prayer book found in ruins in Egypt

sion, a story that has a very early oral tradition, according to the Rev. Louis Zakkar of the institute. The second section, also of ancient tradition, is a hymn to the cross. It reads in part: Rise up, rise up, O holy cross, And lift me, O cross, I shall mount upon you, O cross. They shall hang me upon you as a witness to them.

The monastery, called Kaser al-Vitez, or the Palace of the Wild Goose, was discovered and partially excavated last year by Keith C. Seele, professor emeritus at the institute. Professor Seele, however, was forced to leave with his boats before nav-

igation up the Nile was made impossible. George Scanlon, director of the Cairo office of the American Research Center, took over, his base a single houseboat anchored above the dam. Racing against time Mr. Scanlon and a force of 50 natives dug out the sand-packed monastery and made the prize find in a monk's cell.

The book is illustrated and decorated in red, green and black with motifs of a kind that Father Zakkar said are similar to those found in Nubian art. Mr. Scanlon described it as "a most amusing eccedidie, his mouth agape; also ostriches after the crucifixion," he said.

Figure 2. From the New York Times. © 1965 The New York Times Company. All rights reserved. Used under license.

And that's how I close the article.² Throughout my life, I had puzzled, "What can I do to bring these ideas out?" This article is my attempt to do that.

2. Sanka Knox, "Old Coptic MS. Unearthed Near Abu Simbel; Prayer Book, Put at 10th Century, Found at Monastery Ruin," *New York Times*, December 24, 1965, <https://www.nytimes.com/1965/12/24/archives/old-coptic-ms-unearthed-near-abu-simbel-prayer-book-put-at-10th.html>.

ORIGIN OF “THE BOOK OF MORMON AS A RESURRECTED BOOK AND A TYPE OF CHRIST”

Now I want to discuss the concept of the Book of Mormon as a resurrected book. This idea came to me one time in the early 1990s. I was just sitting in my living room one evening thinking about what the Book of Mormon had passed through, and it occurred to me: “Whoa, wait a minute, that’s the same pattern that the Lord went through when He lived on earth.” They both originated in the heavens, as Lehi’s vision and other scriptures tell us. They both descended to earth. They both disseminated their doctrines. They were both rejected of men and buried. They both came forth in a resurrection. They both have eleven official witnesses. And they both return to heaven with angelic accompaniment and a promise of a future return.

And so, the book itself is a witness of Christ on nearly every page. But also, in its development, the book followed the pattern of His life. On the title page of the Book of Mormon, it says that it would “come forth.” I recognize that as resurrection language—that it would “come forth.” When Jesus brought Lazarus back from the dead, He said, “Lazarus, come forth,” and John uses this same resurrection language that we find on the title page of the Book of Mormon.

What spiritual experience did I have about that? Well, it was an overwhelming one like the one I had with the idea of the Crucifixion and Judgment. I had seen that a noted musical conductor from New York, John McGlenn, was going to come to Abravanel Hall in Salt Lake City, where the Utah Symphony performs. Remarkably, he had been restoring—bringing back from the past—some of the songs from early musical theatre and movies, so they could be performed just the way they had been originally. He went into warehouses in New Jersey and Long Island and found the actual scores that were used in the orchestra pit at the time. The program that he was going to present featured this music. I always admired some of that music, like that composed by Jerome Kern and George Gershwin, and others from that period. And I said to my wife, Ewan, “Let’s go up and hear it.” It was kind of out of the way to go very often to Salt Lake City from Provo, where we then lived. But we did it.

At the performance, the man brought back many pieces, and I enjoyed it a lot. Well, after the intermission, he came back out and said to the

audience, “You’re now going to hear the first public performance of a song.” He said that about 1930, Jerome Kern was engaged from New York to come out to Hollywood. Warner Brothers wanted Kern to write the music for a film. And the words were to be written by Otto Harbach, who happened to be a native of Salt Lake City. In fact, some of Harbach’s relatives had spoken to the man that came from New York with his singers. And he mentioned they were glad he was doing Uncle Otto’s music.

Well, the reason it hadn’t been heard before was that Warner Brothers had sort of panicked. When sound pictures started to appear in 1927 (which happens to be the year I was born), studios made lots of musicals and they worried that the public was tiring of that genre. So, they decided not to use much of Kern’s music in the final film. It had just laid in a box for all these years. And it was thought that it had been lost. “But,” he said, “this summer I found this box while going through their archives, and you’re going to hear a song from it now.” Then he said, “When you hear this piece, which never has been performed for a live audience before, you’ll say to yourselves, ‘Imagine a thing as beautiful as that has been in a box for sixty years and nobody knew anything about it.’” And so, I perked up to listen to this beautiful song.³

As it started, I heard the singers from New York give the first line of that song, which says, “There’s a message in that old melody they’re playing,” and referring to it as a “heavenly melody.” In the film scene, I believe there was a restaurant with performers, and this couple was remembering each other’s past relationships.

As they started to sing that song, I was aware, like I was at Columbia University before, that there was a presence near me. I knew that the other people around me in the balcony of the Abravanel Hall didn’t hear it. But it was clear to me, and there was someone there talking to me. “George,” he said, “there’s something I want you to understand.” Same words that were used back when I was at Columbia: “Something I want you to understand.” “That once something from the past like this is brought back and restored,” he said, “if it’s a thing of beauty, or if it’s helpful or useful, or in other

3. Jerome Kern and Otto Harbach, “Every Little While.” This is one of the songs that was in the CD *Jerome Kern Treasury* released in 1993 by Angel Records and Warner Classics. It may be heard on YouTube.

words, praiseworthy—a godly thing—I want you to know that I brought that back. I did that.”

A thought then passed quickly through my mind, “There are millions of things like that.” But then, as though he knew what I was thinking, he said, “And the detail with which I am involved in the lives of my children, you have never imagined.” And then he said, “Don’t be afraid to think of the Book of Mormon as a resurrected book.” And he left me.

That was the assurance I had that I was on the right track.

Before too long, I decided to write a chapter for a book *Interpreter* was publishing in honor of my longtime friend and colleague, Louis Midgley, a book titled *Remembrance and Return*. As I studied, more and more things became related to it, and I was very pleased with the outcome of it in terms of reflecting my feelings that I had when that happened to me. And a few years ago, it was published with the title “The Book of Mormon as a Resurrected Book and a Type of Christ.” That’s how this essay came to be.

ORIGIN OF “JOSEPH SMITH AT THE VEIL: SIGNIFICANT RITUAL, SYMBOLISM, AND TEMPLE INFLUENCE AT LATTER-DAY SAINT BEGINNINGS”

First, a little background. When we lived in Oregon, I tried to spend time studying the gospel in earnest. I found out that there was a wonderful library in the town of Mount Angel nearby. It was about a twenty- or thirty-minute drive from where I lived. It was a busy Catholic training institution, and they had a good library. Of course, they didn’t have our Church history, but I had access to regular history and theology books.

The librarian there was very kind to me and allowed me to check out books. So, I would go there about once a month and get some of their theological books. At the time, I think they had the best theological library in the whole Northwest, even better than what was in Seattle. It was very good, even though it was just a small town just outside of Salem.

I mention this to show I was quite sincere in trying to improve my understanding of a lot of theological things and Church history. During my mission in the British Isles from 1949 to 1951, I felt a strong desire to better understand the history of the Church. I didn’t have an opportunity

to study very much at that time, since I was very busy as a missionary. But I made a determination in my mind. I can remember thinking about that as the boat left the harbor to go back to the States. As I saw England fading away, I thought to myself, I'm going to make it a point, no matter what I may have to do in life, to do something about learning about early history of the Church and understanding it better.

Later, in Salem, I remember sitting in the living room one day. I was reading about Martin Harris. He was one of the first people to assist Joseph in the translation as his scribe. And there were accounts where he had said that Joseph put up a curtain or a blanket or something between him while they were translating. All of the mentions of that curtain that I could find were in non-Latter-day Saint sources that he had spoken to. But it impressed me that the accounts all agreed. And I thought that he must have told them something like that.

Well, their interpretation of it was that Joseph put up a curtain because he was deceiving his scribe. They thought he didn't have any plates, but just wanted his scribe to believe that he had them. And I said to myself, "I don't think that's true." And then the inspiration came to me strongly: "That was a representation of the temple veil between him and his scribe."

Oh, that just shook me with interest immediately. I spoke to my wife and asked, "What do you think about this?" I explained it to her, and she cried. She said, "George, the Spirit says to me you've got a truth there that's an important truth." So, I kept that in mind.

When we moved to Utah in 1988, I would mention this idea to Latter-day Saint historians, and they would say, "Oh, no, we usually just say that we don't think it really happened, that it's just something that often appears in anti-Mormon books." So that was the only answer I got, and I didn't have any confirmation of it until I decided I'm going to write that up and see what are the consequences of it.

Eventually, everything came together in this essay, entitled "Joseph Smith at the Veil: Significant Ritual, Symbolism, and Temple Influence at Latter-day Saint Beginnings." Here, I decided to discuss this concept of the veil, the idea of Joseph Smith having something between him and his scribe, as representing the temple veil.

Well, as I started to write it, I thought there was a lot of background that people need to know. It took me two years to write it, because so many

things were related to it in Joseph's life in preparation for that moment. And it shows the importance of the temple from the very beginning of the Restoration.

Many things that Joseph experienced were later related to things of the temple. And in this instance, I see him as setting up a sort of a provisional veil in this little room, the upper room of the house where he and Martin Harris are doing some translating. And I also see that room as similar to the Holy of Holies in the ancient temple where the high priest would come in and seek revelation. And that was the location of the ark of the covenant, which had the scriptures in it.

In this room, Joseph is there with the trappings of the ancient high priest. He has a breastplate and the Urim and Thummim. He has a box in which the gold plates were stored. And I could see from the way they treated it and discussed that box, Joseph and Martin Harris saw it as a representation of the ancient ark of the covenant where the scriptures were stored anciently.

So this translation room, I think, amounted to a temple. The things that were done there are things that normally would be done in a temple. And, for this purpose, it had to serve as a temple—it's the only place they had at that time. The Lord made it a sacred place where they could do their work in a templelike setting.

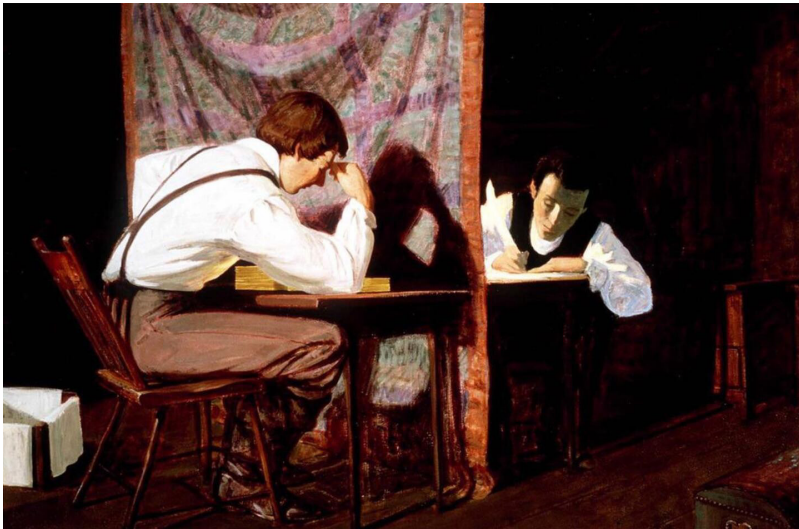


Figure 3. Translation of the Plates, by Earl Jones.

And so, it's kind of a long article, but it shows how this same thing held true later in his life, even at the time when he introduced the temple endowment in Nauvoo, after the people had already gotten acquainted with the Masonic order of things. He had to introduce the temple ordinances and there were some similarities to the Masonic rites. But, as he explained to one of the brethren, the Masonic order was an apostate order, much like the other doctrines and teachings of other churches were at the time. For this reason, they needed to have a restoration of the truth and the ordinances with proper authority.

In those relatively few instances where there are similarities between temple ordinances and Masonic ritual, Joseph gives a different interpretation of their meaning and purpose, and he adds, very importantly, the idea that a covenant relationship is given to the people as they go into the temple, which was not available through Freemasonry at all. These things come together in a wonderful way, and I've tried to treat that as well as I'm able in this essay.

ORIGIN OF “JOSEPH SMITH AND THE MAGICAL CONTEST”

I met my wife, Ewan, at church in New York. After we got married, we went to Oregon to live. Two of our children were born in New York and we didn't feel comfortable raising them there. We were Westerners, really. She was raised in the Los Angeles area, and I was raised in Logan, Utah.

My parents had moved to Salem, Oregon, where my father was manager of the Borden milk plant there for a time. And after we visited them on vacation, we thought, “Why don't we live here in Oregon? It's lovely here.” So I sought for work there, and I ended up working for the state of Oregon for about twenty-five years in various capacities, starting as a budget analyst in the governor's office and eventually doing other things, such as educational planning for the state.

My job sometimes required me to go to meetings in other places, and on one occasion they sent me to some meetings in New York. I had a little extra time, so I walked out of my hotel. I saw a bookstore and said to myself, “Oh, let's just see what's in here.”

They had a section on religion. And there was one book that was standing out in front of the others, like it hadn't been pushed back into

the shelf. It came to my attention, and I picked it up. It was a book by E. M. Butler, a professor at Cambridge University, called *The Myth of the Magus*. The book was an attempt to show common elements in the lives of wonder-working persons in the past, including prophets as well as other kinds of people in different cultures. It has quite a wide range of things. As I looked it over, I said to myself, “You know, I think I ought to buy this and take it home. I think there might be something of interest in here.”

When I got home and read it, it really brought my attention to the idea of the *magical contest*. This term is used throughout the book, and later scholars have used it, too. But I think maybe a better term is a *ritual contest*. In spite of that, when I wrote on the subject I used *magical* because I thought it was kind of an eye-catcher for people.

Butler shows how the magical contest functioned in the lives of the people written about. That’s when I first started thinking, “Well, did Joseph Smith have such an encounter?” And then I could see the relationship as I pondered that and worked at it a bit. Butler had identified ten common elements in the lives studied. And as I looked at the life of Joseph Smith, I could see him in all ten of them, though some more than others. Things like portents at birth, perils in infancy. You know, the time somebody shot at him once when he was a child, and also this terrible thing with the operation on his leg, and so on. But the big idea that caught my eye was the notion of a magical contest, which Butler says is always there for these individuals.

It also occurred to me very strongly that ancient prophets such as Moses and Elijah had contests with magicians—Moses with the magicians from Pharaoh’s court and Elijah with the priests of the false god Baal. And Peter’s contest with Simon Magus, who was a sorcerer. And they won these contests because they had a superior power. And the reason I liked thinking of it as a *ritual* contest was because they always seemed to involve rites of some kind.

Later, I was asked to do a chapter in a festschrift in honor of Daniel Peterson, who was the editor of the *FARMS Review* and later organized the Interpreter Foundation. I decided to write a chapter in this book, which I call “Joseph Smith and the Magical Contest.” In my chapter, I discuss two contests in particular.



Figure 4. *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America: A History*, by Johannes Dillinger.

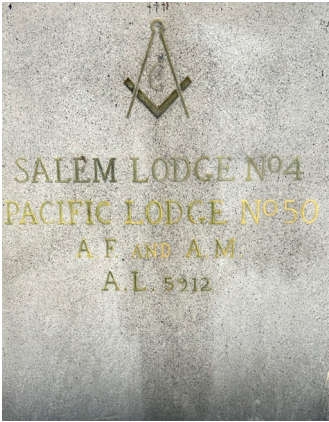
became well established for a time. Joseph was immersed in that culture.

The second contest I discuss was his encounter with the ritual of Freemasonry. I received inspiration on this one day while in my office building in Salem, Oregon, which the state had renovated from its former use as a Masonic lodge. My own desk was by some windows that on the outside were surrounded by the Masonic square and compass symbols that still remained on the building. I was then contemplating the idea of a magical contest, and an impression came very strongly to me while at my desk in this unique setting that “Joseph Smith’s encounter with Freemasonry was a magical contest.” (Not coincidentally, I learned later from a Mason in Salem that my desk was located on the place in the building where the primary rituals were performed by the Lodge).

I came to realize that this encounter would give the evil power the opportunity to interfere with the development of the temple ordinances, to insert certain things, maybe in a very subtle way so that people wouldn’t recognize what was happening. Certain things in Freemasonry, which

The first contest that I discuss is his encounter with the practitioners of folk magic at the time of his youth. Now this was a very prominent thing that was happening in the northeast part of the United States at the time when Joseph was a boy and as he grew up. A lot of people were involved in trying to find buried treasure through ritual means.

There’s a wonderful book on that subject by a German scholar named Johannes Dillinger entitled *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America: A History*. He shows its origin going back several generations, back into Europe. And then how it continued in America and



Figures 5–8. Former Salem, Oregon, lodge building.

were outwardly similar but with different purpose of meaning in the endowment, could be used later to attack Joseph Smith when he received the temple ordinances.

One of the things that I point out is that the Prophet will enter sometimes into the ritual of his opponent to show he has a better use of it—a better, more godly purpose in it. And I try, in this essay, to show how these ritual contests with Joseph Smith were similar to ritual contests anciently.

Going back to the treasure digging, in one of these accounts, it tells us how the person in charge of the dig set apart the location, trying to make

it a kind of holy place. And then he mentions that they needed to have eleven witnesses. Well, that gives the game away to me. It was a ritualized mockery of the Resurrection and Christ's eleven official witnesses.

But what occurred to me also was the way that Joseph Smith himself goes to get buried treasure just like they did. That's one of the important insights when you see these ideas coming together—the Resurrection of Christ being mocked, and the resurrection of the Book of Mormon as a type of Christ being mocked at the same time. And I remember the first experience that the Crucifixion is a mockery.

Now it was my son John's insight when I wrote this essay to add a section at the end about the Crucifixion as the most prominent and important of all ritual contests. It was a ritual contest that Christ entered into voluntarily. He said He could get legions of angels if He needed so He would not have to go through with it. But in the end, He voluntarily entered into a Roman way of taking people's lives, which itself was a ritual designed to make a warning example of the person being crucified.

And so, I see that all coming together. It's important to understand this whole thing—the concept of the ritual and of the mockery that's in it in each case. It all comes together to me that way.

Now we have to understand that Joseph Smith was immersed in this because it was all around him as he was growing up. From his youth, even back to his childhood, he was recognized as a highly inspired person. It's claimed that he found lost objects for people and various things like that. Well, he got involved, as it seemed to be a type of thing he was able to do to help them. And then he's called to repentance by the angel Moroni, who comes to tell him that he has got to leave those people. That there were evil men among them, and that he had a godly work to do. He's called to go up on the Hill Cumorah and to receive the plates eventually. But it's Martin Harris that recalled that Moroni had told him that he must leave the company of those evil men and not go back to them anymore.

Well, they're the ones that persecuted him after he had the plates, because they apparently thought they could possibly obtain such a treasure, and that they ought to be able to share this find with Joseph because he was one of their people. They reacted that way and made it necessary for him to move away to another location as he translated. Joseph says that the Lord appeared to Martin Harris and told him he had to come and help

Joseph, and He told Martin what he had to do. That brings us now to the idea of Joseph Smith being symbolically at the veil when he translated the Book of Mormon, an idea that is only referenced in accounts attributed to Martin Harris.

EPILOGUE AND TESTIMONY: MORTAL LIFE AND ETERNAL LIFE

The inspiration I've experienced in writing has made a profound difference in my life. And it always kept me wanting to be active in the Church and to accept callings that have come to me.

I served as a bishop for a time. I've served in three different high councils. And in Manhattan Ward, I served as a counselor in the bishopric. I was often called to serve in teaching positions throughout my life. And so, I've always kept active in the Church. I think these experiences helped me do that. And I realize now that these opportunities to serve were important things for me to be doing, those things that the Church had me do.

Some might think that the things you have to do in various callings in the Church would take away from the time that could otherwise be used for study. But I don't think about it that way. I think it's important for us to have a well-rounded experience in life. And I've come to believe this very strongly, that when we pass away and go to the other side, we will find that each one of us had a life that was designed by the Lord.

Out of billions of people that will pass through this mortal life, no two have the exact same experience. Each individual is unique. And the things we experience relate in some way to what God's going to have us do on the other side of the veil when we pass on. Sometimes we can't understand how they relate right now, but someday we will.

The Lord has done something that is useful for us. Someday when we look at some of the worst things we experience, I think that we'll weep and say to the Lord, "I'm glad you took me through that. I see now how that helped me." I believe that will happen to us. I really do.

I would like to tell an experience of my wife, Ewan Harbrecht Mitton. She was raised in Los Angeles, and she became a very noted singer in the area. And at the age of twenty, she won a singing contest at the Hollywood Bowl with a big orchestra and a huge audience. It won her two years

of operatic training in Milan, Italy. She went over there and studied with really top-notch, internationally known teachers from that area.

At the end of her training, she gave a concert at a theater in Milan. There were rave reviews. We've got clippings in Italian that we've had translated. They really liked her. The result of that was that the management at La Scala, the opera house in Milan, the premier opera house in Italy, called her and said, "Would you come and audition for us? We might want to use you as one of our basic people here."

So she did, and she sang well for them. They were very impressed with her. As she was getting ready to leave, one of them said, "Would you sing one more for me?" And she said, "Well, what is that?" "I'd like to hear you do the Queen of the Night aria from Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*." That's a very difficult aria. A high note in it and lots of florid things. But she had been practicing it with her teacher, so she thought, "I can do that." So, she did it really well until the very high note. And when she got to the high note, her voice cracked. That had never happened before in her life. And it never, to my knowledge, happened again in her life. They all put their pencils away. They must have said to themselves, "Well, she's great in every way, but that kind of unexpected occurrence could happen in a performance. We can't take that chance."

Ewan wrote this up not long before she died in a little penciled notebook I found afterward in a drawer. "I went back to my room and I cried all night," she said. "Packed all my things and went back to New York."

This was her evaluation at the end of her life: "The Lord cut me down so that I would go back to New York, meet my husband, and have a family." And that did occur. Now, if she'd stayed there, she may never have had a family. Maybe she would have married someone who would keep her in Italy. At that time, the Church didn't even meet anywhere in all of Italy. She had to get on the train to go to Switzerland to go to church. She would have hardly ever seen her parents in California. Her life would have been entirely different. Who knows what?

Now I say, perhaps all of us, to some extent, have experiences in our life that are deep disappointments. But if we'll be faithful to the Lord through them, He'll see us through it and in the end we'll be better off than if we had gone the way we thought we wanted to go. I think Ewan's experience in Milan is a good example of this. She had many opportunities to perform

in the future, including being called as featured soloist with the Tabernacle Choir when it toured Europe in 1955. While raising a family, she also taught music at the college level for many years, had other concerts and operatic performances, and was a beloved singing teacher for many students. Later in Utah, she established an opera company in Provo, providing many opportunities for accomplished singers to share their talents with the community.

When my wife died, John was with me at the time. And she was ready to go. And because of a near-death experience she'd had earlier in her life, she wanted to go, but she didn't want to go before she'd accomplished what the Lord wanted her to do while she was here. But she was very much eager to get on her way.

The week that she died, my sister called me from Boise area and wanted to know how she was. Well, all that week she'd been in great pain, but slept a lot also. And my sister said, "You know, I'd like to tell you what happened when my husband died." He had cancer of the esophagus and was in great pain. And she said, "I went to the hospital managers and asked, 'Could you find the ward that we're in here and have them send some brethren out and administer to him to see if we can't reduce his pain?'" So, these men came out, put their hands on his head, and the brother giving the blessing said, "You have completed all you need to do in this life, and should feel free to go whenever you want." And he died right then, with the hands on his head.

After she told me that, I said to John, "Maybe we ought to bless Ewan to see if we get any inspiration about her." So, we did that. John was the voice and said something like was said to my sister's husband, I believe, that she should feel free to go. And within an hour she was gone. She just breathed less. She didn't even wake up the whole time. She just breathed less and less until she was gone.

Now, an interesting sequel. A few months ago, my sister, in the Boise area, died. And we went over to the funeral. And I talked to her youngest child. I said, "Were you aware of what happened when your dad died?" She said, "Was I aware? I was present when it happened. I was eighteen years old then." After verifying what her mother said about what happened during the blessing of her father, she added, "I want to share with you something more about that remarkable experience. We were in a hospital

room, a large room, that would allow four beds, but only his bed was occupied. But when I was in there, it felt strongly to me that the room was crowded with people, almost claustrophobic, even though I did not see them. And when I left after he died, I realized that I was sensing the spirits of the people who were going to welcome him on the other side of the veil.”

Well, she cried when she told me this. It was a real experience for her. And I thought about that a lot. I think when we pass to the other side, if we’ve lived a decent life, we’re going to find it’s a time of great joy, going back in the company of people, some of whom we’ve known here in mortality, others we knew before we came. It will restore our relationship with them, and maybe we’ll find people we love as deeply as anyone we’ve loved now here in this life. And the memory of it will be given back to us.

So all of that tells me that I’ll be glad when I can move on. Of course, I want to do anything more the Lord wants me to do, but I’ll be glad when I can move on.

When my mother passed away, she was buried in Logan, Utah, where I will be buried next to my wife. And I went with my dad to see the mortician about the arrangements and everything the day before the funeral.

A Brother Hall owned the Hall Mortuary. Now, he was known in the city as a very faithful man. He’d been, I think, a stake president, and we knew him quite well. We knew he was a believing type of man. And my dad said to him, “Brother Hall, do you think my wife, in the spirit, will be allowed to be present at her funeral tomorrow?” And Brother Hall looked at him sort of like, “Should I tell him, or shouldn’t I?” Brother Hall said, “I’m going to share something with you, Brother Mitton. I have many times seen the spirits of the people whose bodies I was working on.” He said, “It got so much interfering with my work that I had to pray and ask the Lord to take that gift away from me.” And I could tell he was sincere when he said that.

I believe it’s true that the things on the other side are very, very real. And that if we strive to do what’s right on this side of the veil, we’ll be very happy on the other side. Very happy indeed. The things discussed in these essays offer much guidance for our preparation to meet the Lord at the veil, and at His Final Judgment.



Figure 9. *George and Ewan Mitton and their grandchildren, 2002. (Left to right) Top row: Ellen (Larsen) Irion, Valerie Larsen, Creed Larsen, Eric Larsen, Ben Larsen, Emmalee Larsen, Christopher Mitton, Joshua Mitton. Middle row: Daniel Mitton, Anna (Mitton) Mefford, Mark Tingey, Ewan (Harbrecht) Mitton, George Mitton, Curtis Mitton, Amy (Mitton) Ivan, Jason Mitton. Bottom row: Stephen Mitton, Allison Mitton, Rebecca (Mitton) Ostermiller, Matthew Tingey, Erika (Tingey) Beckrest, Andrew Mitton.*

Acknowledgments

I express appreciation to my children: Elizabeth M. Larsen, David L. Mitton, John P. Mitton, and Esther M. Phelts. As children, and later with their spouses, they were always patient and supportive when I would spend time in libraries, attempt to write, or attend subject-related conferences. I have appreciated their comments on drafts of my writings.

Over the years, some scholars and friends have been particularly helpful through their encouragement and recommendations. I am especially grateful for the kindness of Leonard J. Arrington, Hugh W. Nibley, Daniel C. Peterson, Louis C. Midgley, William J. Hamblin, John W. Welch, Margaret Barker, Richard Lloyd Anderson, Stanley B. Kimball, Shirley S. and Stephen D. Ricks, Jeffrey D. Lindsay, Matthew L. Bowen, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, and Gordon and Kathleen Lindsay. They were very helpful, but I am responsible for what I have written.

I was pleased to be a charter member of The Interpreter Foundation, present when it was organized in 2012, and am now a member of the Board of Advisors. I am thankful for the experience I had prior to that in assisting the staff and leadership of FARMS, The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies. It was a great learning experience as I provided volunteer assistance and for a decade was an associate editor of the *FARMS Review*. Editorial comments and other things published in that journal are listed in my bibliography herein.¹

-
1. For a brief history of the editing and publication of the *FARMS Review*, see *Steadfast in Defense of Faith: Essays in Honor of Daniel C. Peterson*, ed. Shirley S. Ricks, Stephen D. Ricks, and Louis C. Midgley (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2023), 25–53.

Much of my writing would not have been possible without the assistance and encouragement of my son John. I am now ninety-six and have difficulty getting about and doing many things. He has helped with transportation, obtaining sources to consult, discussing drafts and suggesting improvements and additional ideas, source checking, computer details, and presentation needs. I am most grateful for what he has done for me.