

Chapter Nine

INFANT SALVATION

Book of Mormon Theology in a Nineteenth-Century Context

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Published in 1830, the Book of Mormon entered the American scene during the Second Great Awakening when ideas about religion were at a height of excitement and contention. The Book of Mormon itself describes nineteenth-century America as a time when many churches would be built up and “contend with one another” and states that the Nephite record “shall be of great worth unto the children of men” because it will reveal God’s standard of truth and contain the many “plain and precious parts of the gospel” that have been lost from the Bible.¹ Prophets within the Book of Mormon also state that they have foreseen, in revelations from God himself, the time when this book will come forth and that they are writing to the individuals who will live in that day.² Such repeated internal references within the record emphasize that one intended audience of the Book of Mormon’s theological arguments was its initial readers in early nineteenth-century America. Consequently, one should not be

too surprised by well-known Restoration minister Alexander Campbell's assertion in 1831 that the Book of Mormon resolved "every error and almost every truth discussed in New York for the last ten years."³

Now, in the twenty-first century, the Book of Mormon is often recognized by believers and skeptics alike as one of the most significant religious works to come out of the nineteenth century.⁴ Yet very little systematic analysis of its theology within the context of nineteenth-century American theology has been undertaken.⁵ Such studies would greatly aid our understanding of how Mormonism fit within its initial context. In what ways were the ideas presented by Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon unusual? In what ways were they extensions or repetitions of commonly held beliefs? Recognizing that a comprehensive analysis of the Book of Mormon's theology would likely require multiple books, this article seeks to simply provide an example of the methodology such a study may employ, taking as its case study the doctrine of infant baptism and salvation as presented in the Book of Mormon by Abinadi, King Benjamin, and Mormon within the context of prominent religious denominations in 1820s and 1830s America.

Although the focus of this paper is the theology surrounding infant baptism, one should remember that the theological debate became a live issue because of the high infant mortality rates in nineteenth-century America. Between 1830 and 1860 in the United States, 15 percent of infants died before their first birthdays and a quarter of all children died before they reached the age of five.⁶ Because infant baptism and salvation were highly pertinent and controversial issues, converts to the Church of Christ (later to be known as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and often referred to as the Mormon Church) would have been interested in the Book of Mormon's teaching on this doctrine. Consequently, placing Abinadi's and others' teachings on infant salvation within the context of competing nineteenth-century theologies offers a pertinent example of how our understanding of the Book of Mormon, the early Church, and nineteenth-century American theological diversity will be enhanced by systematic studies of individual doctrine within an early nineteenth-century framework.

Three individuals in the Book of Mormon discuss the issue of infant salvation: King Benjamin, Abinadi, and Mormon. The first mention of infant salvation in the text comes as a part of King Benjamin's sermon to his people (about 124 BC) in which he gives them a new name (they are to take upon them the name of Christ) and appoints his son Mosiah as his successor. As part of this speech, King Benjamin recounts the words an angel shared with him. The angel tells him about Christ coming to earth and atoning for the sins of humankind and commands him to share the message with his people that they might rejoice and know how they may be saved. Significant to our discussion are the angel's words that "the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy."⁷ The point of the angel's message is clearly to explain that Christ is the only way to salvation, and he appears to mention infant salvation to accentuate Christ's justice and mercy and how all, even infants, are saved only because "the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins."⁸

Following King Benjamin's discussion in the text but predating his discussion chronologically (about 148 BC), Abinadi's declaration that "little children also have eternal life" is part of his trial sermon before King Noah and his priests.⁹ Abinadi mentions little children's salvation as part of his discussion about who will receive salvation through Christ's Atonement. Agency and knowledge become paramount as only those "that have willfully rebelled against God, that have known the commandments of God, and would not keep them" will not receive the desired salvation.¹⁰ Little children are an example of individuals who do not possess sufficient knowledge to choose and, consequently, are saved, along with those who have chosen Christ, through Christ's Atonement. Similar to the angel's message to King Benjamin, Abinadi's discourse centers on the reality of Christ coming down to earth—to suffer, to atone, and to redeem his people.

Three hundred fifty pages and roughly 550 years later (around AD 400), another individual in the pages of the Book of Mormon again turns our attention to the salvation of little children. Mormon, in an epistle to his son Moroni, declares that little children are saved through Christ's mercy, and explicitly condemns the baptism of little children as "solemn mockery before God."¹¹ Much more will be said of this epistle later, but for now it is sufficient to note that Mormon's discussion also focuses on

revealing the reality and exhaustiveness of Christ's Atonement. Notably, in each instance where infant salvation is addressed in the Book of Mormon, it is a part of a larger conversation about Christ's Atonement and who will be saved.

RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE OF EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA (NEW ENGLAND AND NEW YORK)

When writing his life history, Joseph Smith described the “extraordinary scene of religious feeling” he witnessed as a fourteen-year-old in Palmyra, New York: it was a “time of great excitement. . . . Great were the confusion and strife among the different denominations. . . . Some were contending for the Methodist faith, some for the Presbyterian, and some for the Baptist.”¹² Here Smith encapsulated the excitement and contention that religion incited in early nineteenth-century America during what has come to be known as the Second Great Awakening—a movement that reached its peak in the 1820s and 1830s and expanded the evangelical revivalism of the First Great Awakening as it diversified and democratized the American religious landscape.¹³ Ideas from the Calvinist (or Reformed) school of Christian theology, such as the utter depravity of man due to the fall of Adam, a limited atonement, and the doctrine of election (the doctrine that God has already chosen who will be saved), dominated the First Great Awakening (1730s–50s) and religious thought throughout the eighteenth century.¹⁴ Though competing religious ideas always existed in America, most “theological movements had to define themselves in relation to the Calvinist traditions.”¹⁵

During the Second Great Awakening, however, Calvinism declined while Arminianism, a school of Christian thought that stressed prevenient grace,¹⁶ universal atonement, and human free will and personal responsibility (in other words, Christ died for all people and God wills all men and women to accept Christ, but each must choose if he or she will be saved or not) gained popularity in many nineteenth-century denominations.¹⁷ Universalism, another school of Christian theology that had a significant effect on religious thought in early nineteenth-century America, centered on the belief that everyone will be saved through Christ's suffering on the

cross.¹⁸ As indicated by the basic theological disagreements among the three groups, religious controversies in upstate New York in the 1820s revolved primarily around the questions of human free will and who will be saved¹⁹—questions that were central to the debates over infant baptism and salvation.

Rather than focusing directly on these three schools of Christian theology, however, this article draws from the diverse and competing denominations of the early nineteenth century in order to understand and analyze the debate over infant baptism. Doing so creates an expansion rather than a collapse of the arguments and allows us to understand the debate as individuals in the nineteenth century would have understood it. As E. Brooks Holifield explains, “By the end of the eighteenth century, most American theologians understood themselves as advocates for a particular denomination. They wrote for example, as Presbyterians, Baptists, or Catholics, and in debates the denominational identifications pushed toward the forefront.”²⁰ For lay members, denominational identification was even more pronounced as they defined themselves and their religious beliefs according to the local practices and teachings of their congregation and not those of particular theological schools.

The focus on denominations over theological movements does however present certain challenges, perhaps most significantly the choice of which denominations to represent. In this decision, I have been guided by Joseph Smith’s own words on the matter: the first religious groups addressed in this article—Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist—are those Smith mentioned in his history as participants in the religious ferment in 1820s Palmyra, New York.²¹ Notably, Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian faiths were the three largest denominations by 1830.²² Additionally, I discuss Universalism, because of its known influence on Smith’s father and his grandfather, as well as Alexander Campbell’s Restorationist movement, because of the high number of early Mormon converts who came from break-offs of this faith tradition.²³ To acquaint readers with these denominations, I begin each section with a brief synopsis of what distinguished this faith tradition in early nineteenth-century America before offering an analysis of its position on infant baptism and salvation as recorded in writings from the 1820s and 1830s. The focus is on their rationale as well as

their presentation of themselves and other denominations in regard to this question. This analysis then lays the groundwork for understanding what the Book of Mormon contributed to this discussion—how it acknowledged, and at times resolved, different debates while constructing its own singular teaching on the subject as a whole.

PRESBYTERIAN

At the end of the Revolutionary War and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Presbyterian and Congregationalist faiths were the two largest churches in America.²⁴ While they would soon cede this position to the Methodists and Baptists, they continued to dominate formal religious thought.²⁵ Theologically, both found their roots in the Reformed tradition and John Calvin.²⁶ What separated them was often simply a matter of church structure and government; consequently, in 1801 under the Plan of Union, Presbyterians and Congregationalists joined forces, “regarding themselves almost as a single church and dividing territory as practical need dictated.”²⁷ As the two foremost proponents of Calvinism in early nineteenth-century America, Presbyterian and Congregationalist ministers and theologians sought “to preserve Calvinism by revising it.” Holifield explains, “They saw themselves as meeting three challenges: to defend Calvinism from Unitarian, Universalist, and Arminian critics, a project that required proving its reasonableness; to formulate a Calvinist theology of revivalism; and to maintain a Calvinist piety, which involved, at a minimum, the sense of divine sovereignty, with its correlates of human sinfulness, election, and a grace that overwhelmed without coercing.”²⁸ In other words, most adherents prescribed to the doctrine that God was the sovereign power, humankind was depraved, and the Atonement was limited to a predestined elect; however, within that framework, a great flourishing of theological debate occurred in New England, New York, and the Ohio Valley.²⁹

Mainstream Presbyterians’ and Congregationalists’ beliefs about baptism, and more specifically infant baptism, also had their foundation in Calvinist doctrine. Infant baptism was deemed necessary because of the doctrine of original sin. Leonard Woods, a prominent Congregational pastor who established the American Tract Society and the Temperance

Society, taught that infant baptism is both useful for the infant and those who witness the baptism because “it teaches, very simply, but very significantly, that, even from the womb, children are the subjects of pollution; that they stand in need . . . of purification from that inherent depravity of their nature.”³⁰ Baptism was believed to cleanse infants from original sin, give them access to God’s grace, and introduce them into the Church.³¹ To deny children baptism was to deny them their rights to both baptism and the blessings that Jesus wanted to extend to little children.³²

To counter those who argued that there was no scriptural precedence for infant baptism, Presbyterian ministers regularly cited the existence and complete acceptance of infant baptism “in the beginning of the third century, that is, within about one hundred years of the Apostles.”³³ And subsequently argued that because no record of its origin or any controversy surrounding its existence can be found, it must have always been sanctioned by Christ and the Apostles.³⁴ They also regularly quoted passages of scriptures that seem to promote the principle of “*family baptism* of receiving all the younger members of households *on the faith of their domestic head*.”³⁵ For instance “[Lydia] was baptized, and her household” (Acts 16:14–15), and “the household of Stephanas” was baptized (1 Corinthians 1:16). Perhaps their most oft-used argument connected baptism to circumcision: “As circumcision was of old, baptism is now, the distinctive badge, to mark the church of God from the kingdom of Satan.”³⁶ Since they argued that baptism replaced the initiatory rite of circumcision, it logically followed that as infants were circumcised at eight days of age and became members of the church during the dispensation of the Old Testament, the Apostles during New Testament times “must have considered themselves bound to admit the infants of believers into the gospel church by baptism . . . because no direction to the contrary was given by our Lord.”³⁷ Additionally, Presbyterian and Congregational ministers regularly explained how the sacrament of infant baptism helped parents understand and fulfill their duty to raise their children unto the Lord.³⁸

METHODIST

Methodism was an eighteenth-century movement started by John Wesley, an Anglican minister who was highly influenced by the writings and

teachings of Jacobus Arminius, a sixteenth-century Dutch Reformed pastor who emphasized human will and freedom and that salvation was not foreordained.³⁹ Initially, Methodism sought to reform the Anglican Church from within but soon grew to become its own church, and in 1795, four years after Wesley's death, the Methodists officially broke away from the Church of England and preachers began to spread rapidly throughout Great Britain, America, and the rest of the world.⁴⁰ Methodism soon became the largest and fastest growing denomination in America⁴¹ and presented itself as "a church for the common people, disdainful of Episcopal formality and any dependence on an educated clergy."⁴² A large part of Methodists' wide appeal to apprentices, shopkeepers, and small farmers was their popular approach to religious revivalism⁴³ and their emphasis on adults as free moral agents who were to be active in their quest for salvation, instead of waiting passively for the decree of God, which they understood Calvinism to require.⁴⁴ Debates with Calvinists and Universalists greatly shaped Methodist theology,⁴⁵ and in the early nineteenth century, Methodists "proclaimed the deity of Christ, the depravity of human beings, a universal atonement, and the need for repentance and faith."⁴⁶ They rejected predestination and saw salvation as a cooperative effort with God. Individuals must choose salvation, experience a new birth, and then constantly seek increased holiness or sanctification. Conversion was to be regarded as a process, not a onetime event.⁴⁷ Methodists were also well known for their camp meetings, protracted revivals, and circuit riders traveling on horseback from one isolated spot to another to extend the offer of salvation to all those willing to accept Christ.⁴⁸

The doctrine of baptism, and specifically infant baptism, has been an important, though at times opaque, issue since the beginning of Methodism. Seeming contradictions within the Methodist tradition may be found in Wesley's writings on baptism that were used as the official statements on infant baptism in American Methodism until 1861. In these letters, Wesley supported infant baptism as the rite that initiates individuals into the covenant with God, admits them into the Church, makes them an heir of God's kingdom, and cleanses them from the guilt of original sin.⁴⁹ The difficulty in interpretation lies in the contradiction between Wesley's statement that "infants are guilty of original sin . . . [and] cannot be saved

unless this be washed away by baptism”⁵⁰ and his explanation that Christ’s Atonement already covered original sin and, consequently, dying infants are saved without baptism.⁵¹ In another letter he emphatically stated, “No infant ever was or ever will be ‘sent to hell for the guilt of Adam’s sin,’ seeing it is canceled by the righteousness of Christ as soon as they are sent into the world.”⁵² Because Wesley never dealt with this contradiction, Gayle Carton Felton (author of *The Gift of Water: The Practice and Theology of Baptism Among Methodists in America*) writes, “Perhaps no aspect of Wesley’s thought has been the subject of more debate and confusion than his theology of baptism.”⁵³

The confusion and debate inherent in Wesley’s treatise and throughout Methodism was manifest in the minority of American Methodist ministers in the early nineteenth century who rejected infant baptism.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the official Methodist position supported by an overwhelming number of ministers in early nineteenth-century America was that infants and minor children were to be baptized.⁵⁵ As Felton writes, “American Methodists evinced little doubt about the propriety of infant baptism, but considerable confusion as to its theological significance.”⁵⁶ Methodist preachers were clearly divided on the concept of infant purity versus innate depravity. The dominant position expressed, however, seems to have been that while infants were born with a propensity to sin, they were not intelligent moral agents capable of sin; consequently, they were in a state of justification due to Christ’s Atonement until they reached a state or age of accountability (and thus they could be saved without baptism if they died in infancy).⁵⁷ To defend their pro-infant-baptism position, Methodist clergy regularly cited the antiquity and longevity of the practice (for example, the baptism of households cited in the New Testament and the uncontroversial established practice of infant baptism by at least the third century). Methodist clergy also cited baptism as a replacement of circumcision as the covenant sign in the Christian dispensation and Jesus’s affirmation of children’s place in God’s kingdom and the visible church.⁵⁸ Belief in infant baptism, then, despite minor intradenominational debate, was a defining characteristic of early and mid-nineteenth-century Methodism.

BAPTIST

Baptists appeared in the American Colonies in the early seventeenth century, most famously Roger Williams in Rhode Island.⁵⁹ Theologically, American Baptist congregations had their roots in English Puritanism, which “emphasizes classic Reformation dogmas as *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone), *sole fide* (faith alone), and the priesthood of all believers. Like other Protestants, Baptists practice only two sacraments (ordinances): baptism and the Lords’ Supper.”⁶⁰ Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American Baptists did not have a specific creed that specified what each adherent must believe and practice, and consequently, some prescribed to the Arminian school of Christian theology and differentiated themselves as Free-Will Baptists. Most Baptists, however, in the early nineteenth century adhered to some variety of Calvinist theology.⁶¹ Significantly, as the popularity of the Baptist faith increased dramatically during the early nineteenth century—making it the second largest denomination in early nineteenth-century America⁶²—Baptist preachers brought Calvinist theology to America’s working class through revivals and camp meetings. Within a very loose Calvinist theological framework, however, many different Baptist schools and factions existed.⁶³ What connected most Baptists was “their localism, their biblicism, their ambivalence about creeds and confessions, and their suspicion of elites.”⁶⁴ Above all, Baptists believed that a congregation should be composed of faithful adult baptized believers. Baptism was to be done by immersion as a representation of Jesus’s baptism, his death, and his Resurrection,⁶⁵ and was reserved for those who were old enough to be accountable for their actions and make a conscious, faithful decision to accept Christ as their Redeemer.⁶⁶ Although the age of accountability was a debated issue, baptism by immersion and believer baptism, occurring after one has declared his or her faith in Christ, defined nineteenth-century Baptist beliefs.

With their firm commitment to believer’s baptism, Baptists argued vehemently against infant baptism. Most significantly, they based their disapproval on the fact that the practice has no founding in scripture.⁶⁷ Furthermore, infant baptism not only stripped an individual of the opportunity to be baptized because of personal faith but also made it more difficult for him or her to experience conversion and repentance later in

life because of a false sense of security.⁶⁸ Baptists also disagreed with the popular view espoused by Presbyterians and Methodists that baptism was a continuation of circumcision, arguing instead that the Lord had actually made two covenants with Abraham: the covenant of circumcision, which was fulfilled by the coming of Christ and the covenant of grace, which was also fulfilled by Christ. Consequently, they asserted that “the scheme [of infant Baptism]” is extremely harmful because it places “into [believers’] minds wrong notions of the covenant of grace, and the true spiritual promise; which are the foundation of the religion of Christ. It confounds them with the Jewish covenant, and its promises, and makes them all one—the consequences of which is, a substitution of the law of grace”⁶⁹ and “a substitution of a legal national church, in the place of a congregation of believers.”⁷⁰ In more inflammatory language, one Baptist minister declared, “Infant baptism is an evil because the doctrines upon which it is predicated contradicts the great fundamental principle of justification by faith[,] . . . it subverts the scripture doctrine of infant salvation[,] . . . [and] it leads its advocates into rebellion against the authority of Christ.”⁷¹ Baptists declared that children “are saved by grace through Christ, and without baptism.”⁷² Since most Baptist preachers in the nineteenth century prescribed to the doctrine of the universal depravity of man while also arguing that infants do not have individual accountability, they explained that infants who died automatically had their nature cleansed and purified through the redemption of Christ applied by the Holy Spirit.⁷³ As Baptists argued, to deny that infants were saved was to deny Christ’s grace.

RESTORATIONIST

The most well-known Restorationist minister and theologian in nineteenth-century America was Alexander Campbell. A native of Ireland before migrating to America in 1809, Campbell was first associated with the Presbyterian Church and then with the Baptists.⁷⁴ Restorationists such as Campbell strongly adhered to the Bible as the source of all truth and desired to restore the Christianity of the first century. By restoring primitive Christianity, Restorationists believed they could overcome denominational differences and attain a unity of Christian churches—a unity critical to the evangelization of the world and the ushering in of Christ’s imminent

millennial reign.⁷⁵ Employing populist themes, Restorationists rejected the distinction between clergy and laity and envisioned a church where there was “no hierarchy of elevation of one class above another.”⁷⁶ In terms of theology, Restorationists rejected Calvinist ideas of predestination, original sin, and the bondage of the will. Campbell also rejected the widespread Calvinist doctrine of justification by faith alone, arguing instead that although an individual could never earn salvation, good works and faith were required to continue in a justified state.⁷⁷ In regard to baptism, Restorationists most closely resembled Baptists as they too believed that baptism must be done by immersion and that the person being baptized must consent to being baptized.⁷⁸

Consequently, Restorationists did not practice infant baptism because, according to Campbell, “it is despotism of the worst kind” to baptize infants who do not have a say in their baptism and who cannot be expected to be full believers.⁷⁹ Campbell first began to seriously question the practice of infant baptism when his daughter was born in 1812.⁸⁰ After studying the matter for several months, he concluded there was no scriptural warrant for infant baptism and refused the rite for his daughter.⁸¹ Stressing the importance of believer baptism, Campbell taught that the problem with infant baptism was that “the baptized had no freedom to say yes or no. Parents confessed their faith, but the infant did not.”⁸² Consequently, Campbell declared infant baptisms void and emphatically harmful: “[Baptism] cannot be administered unto an infant without the greatest perversion and abuse of the nature and import of this ordinance.”⁸³ He further charged that “infant baptism was evil in itself” because “it was an act of will worship[,] . . . it carnalized and secularized the church[,] . . . it deceived the child[,] . . . it encourages superstition in the parents[,] . . . [and] it is an effectual means of introducing an ungodly priesthood into the church.”⁸⁴ To argue against infant baptism, Campbell often relied on scriptural references to explain how the nature, design, and promises of baptism are suited only to believers and that individuals in the New Testament were baptized only after they believed.⁸⁵ Infant baptism, as Campbell significantly explained, was also unnecessary because “the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient for their salvation, independent of any deed or thought on the part of man. . . . Neither circumcision nor its substitute, infant

baptism, has availed any thing to the salvation of the subjects.”⁸⁶ Infant baptism then, in the eyes of Campbell and other Restorationists, was not only unnecessary but also harmful to the individual and the church as a whole.

UNIVERSALIST

The core of Universalist theology is the belief that the Bible promises that everyone will receive eternal salvation. Although this idea had proponents in America long before the official formation of either the Unitarians or the Universalists (the two denominations that promoted this doctrine in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America), John Murray was the first proponent of Universalism in America to gain a wide following. In 1779, he established a Universalist congregation in Gloucester, Massachusetts.⁸⁷ By the 1820s, there were an estimated 150 Universalist societies in New York.⁸⁸ Similar to Methodists and Baptists, Universalists found most of their converts among laboring people such as shopkeepers, farmers, and artisans, particularly “in the hill country of rural New England, the work-class neighborhoods of the northeastern cities, and the small towns of western New York.”⁸⁹ Similar to Calvinists, Murray and other early Universalists saw salvation as entirely the work of God from start to finish, believing that God’s will cannot be resisted. Unlike the Calvinists, though, Universalists believed that God had elected all people to salvation. Murray taught that Christ’s death on the cross atoned for the sins of all and that his grace was powerful enough to redeem everyone. Those who were righteous believers would be part of the first resurrection and receive immediate glory. Those who were unbelievers and sinful would remain in a fearful and miserable state until they were redeemed at the second resurrection on the Day of Judgment.⁹⁰ By emphasizing a period of suffering, Murray and other Universalists tried to counter the common accusation by other denominations that Universalist doctrine encouraged sin.⁹¹ Not all Universalists, however, agreed with this period of suffering, including Hosea Ballou, the most well-known American Universalist theologian of the nineteenth century. Ballou differed greatly from his Universalist predecessors with his teachings that “no atonement was necessary to reconcile God to humanity” and that there is no such thing as hell or punishment

after death.⁹² Such views earned him the derogatory distinction of an “ultra-universalist,” but as Holifield writes, “In the 1820s, probably a majority of Universalists accepted the ‘ultra’ position.”⁹³

Although some Universalist ministers believed that ordinances or sacraments such as baptism were important, Murray and Ballou along with most early nineteenth-century Universalists did not.⁹⁴ Ballou thought it was unsuitable for Christians to debate about baptism, particularly infant baptism, and he taught that the scriptures do not support baptism by water as essential for salvation.⁹⁵ Instead, the scriptures speak of the necessity of being “baptized unto Christ,” which, according to Ballou, means “to be clothed with his spirit; to possess the same wisdom and love; and to exercise the same gracious and merciful disposition, as were possessed and exercised by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”⁹⁶ Similarly, Murray saw the actual sacrament of baptism by water as superfluous and unnecessary for salvation, although there was no harm in being baptized by water as a symbol of personal renewal and commitment to God. What was important was believing Christ and being baptized by him through the elements of the Holy Ghost and fire.⁹⁷ As a logical consequence, Murray also rejected infant baptism as unnecessary for salvation, especially because he believed there was no scriptural authority for it.⁹⁸ Murray wrote, “I do not know in the Christian world a more unmeaningful ceremony than Infant Baptism.”⁹⁹ Infants, like all other individuals, are saved through Christ’s atoning grace and Resurrection.

THE BOOK OF MORMON

As primary sources from each of these denominations illustrate, the question of infant baptism and the status of unbaptized infants were controversial and charged subjects in early nineteenth-century America. While only a component of the larger argument about predestination, the image of infant damnation was particularly horrifying; consequently, it became a ready slur for one denomination to throw at another. Denominations that promoted Calvinist theology, in particular, were impugned with believing in the eternal punishment of infants who die because of Calvinism’s strict predestination of election and damnation.¹⁰⁰ While it is difficult to find ministers from any denomination (at least according to their published

sermons and theological treatises) consigning unbaptized infants to hell, it is easy to find preachers stating that other denominations' belief systems promoted or naturally lead to this doctrine.¹⁰¹ Such constant clamoring that other faith practices substantiated or implied the eternal punishment of individuals who die in infancy, in combination with the common religious revival rhetoric of hell and brimstone awaiting those who do not embrace Christ, certainly contributed to society's anxiety over the status of unbaptized infants. The prophet Abinadi's clear and unequivocal statement from the Book of Mormon that "little children also have eternal life" would have been welcome news to many.¹⁰²

One of the Book of Mormon's strengths is the simplicity with which it states many of its theological positions. As a record attesting to the status of scripture, the authors of the Book of Mormon do not offer long treatises to justify or substantiate their opinions in regard to other faith practices. Instead, truths in the Book of Mormon are stated directly and succinctly. For instance, the prophet Abinadi—without any justification for his profession of doctrine—simply states that little children have part in the first resurrection, along with all those who believe in Christ and keep the commandments of God.¹⁰³ Similarly, the angel who addresses King Benjamin, simply yet profoundly states that "the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy" and that little children are "found blameless before God" and cannot sin, yet are still in need of Christ's atoning sacrifice as the source of grace that all people need.¹⁰⁴

Nearly 550 years later (around AD 400), Mormon in his epistle to his son Moroni would echo not only Abinadi's and the angel's message of the salvation of little children but also their teachings on the absolute necessity of Christ, the judgment that follows those who set at naught the Atonement and knowingly disobey God's commandments, and the efficacy of the Atonement for those who sin in ignorance. While Mormon would add a significant emphasis on baptism that does not exist in the earlier speeches—thus indicating a possible shift in the place and importance of rituals within the Nephite faith—his ultimate message (similar to the other two moments in the text that raise the issue of infant salvation) is the reality and exhaustiveness of Christ's Atonement. In other words, Mormon's increased emphasis on this theme is motivated by a desire

to overturn inappropriate practices in his own time. But the incorrect practice of infant baptism was abominable to him because it overturned understandings of the comprehensive nature of Christ's Atonement that had been taught clearly by prophets since the days of Abinadi.

Noting this continuity among these individuals' messages is significant because, while one should be wary of assuming that the Book of Mormon takes a holistic theological stance on issues, considering the timeframe and multiple authors and traditions that it covers, one should be equally aware of how these individuals read and were influenced by one another's writings. Due to Mormon's immersion in previous prophets' writings in order to construct the record, this influence particularly appears to hold true when we look at Mormon's writings and editorial insertions. As John Hilton aptly points out in "Abinadi's Legacy," Mormon intentionally uses Abinadi's words throughout his writing and thereby indicates Abinadi's profound influence on his understanding of Christ, judgement, and the Atonement.¹⁰⁵ I raise this issue because, while I use Mormon's epistle as the starting point for my contextualization of the Book of Mormon, I see these other texts as providing building blocks for Mormon's epistle and readily weave the three texts together to reveal how the Book of Mormon fits within nineteenth-century religious debates surrounding the issue of infant salvation. Abinadi was the first to provide a doctrinal basis for Mormon's teachings on infant salvation.

Coming at the very end of the Book of Mormon, the book of Moroni addresses most directly the challenges and issues within early nineteenth-century American religious ferment. This is fitting as Moroni reports having a detailed vision of the future day when the Book of Mormon will come forth; of all the writers of the Book of Mormon, Moroni speaks most directly to a nineteenth-century Gentile audience, reminding them that he has seen them in vision and knows, by revelation, their actions and the desires of their hearts.¹⁰⁶ The first six chapters of his book deal with liturgical practices such as bestowing the gift of the Holy Ghost, ordaining individuals to different church offices by the laying on of hands, administering the sacrament, and immersive baptism and its function. Subsequent direction on the fallacy of infant baptism comes in the form of a letter from Moroni's father, Mormon. Although the discussion of

infant baptism is lengthy by the standard of other theological discussions within the Book of Mormon, it is strikingly brief in comparison to similar theological discussions on the subject in the early nineteenth century. This brevity may be attributed to the source of Mormon's knowledge regarding infant baptism. Unlike nineteenth-century ministers and theologians who relied on scripture, historical precedence, and reason to make their arguments, Mormon relies simply on the direct words of Christ—which he declares are given to him “by the power of the Holy Ghost”—to make his argument.¹⁰⁷

Christ's words here are powerful, particularly in light of nineteenth-century religious thought, because a single sentence contains answers to the most contentious debates surrounding infant baptism and salvation. Mormon commands his son, and future readers, “Listen to the words of Christ, your Redeemer, your Lord and your God” and then quotes Christ, “Behold, I came into the world not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; the whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore, little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them; and the law of circumcision is done away in me.”¹⁰⁸ In startling brevity, Christ provides the answers to the doctrine of original sin and how individuals may be cleansed of such sin, children's capability to commit sin and who needs repentance and baptism, and the connection between the law of circumcision and baptism.

Christ's mention of Adam's curse is particularly relevant in light of nineteenth-century religious discourse, where Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, and even Universalist ministers all taught that man had inherited a depraved and fallen nature because of Adam's fall.¹⁰⁹ Of the denominations discussed in this article, only the Restorationists had a majority position that rejected the doctrine of original sin (although notably, they too spoke of man's depravity and a “sin of nature”).¹¹⁰ The Book of Mormon espouses the dominant view when Christ confirms the reality of “the curse of Adam” and when Abinadi speaks of “all mankind becoming carnal, sensual, devilish” because of Adam's fall.¹¹¹ The pertinent question in the nineteenth century, then, was not whether original sin existed but rather how one may overcome the effects of original sin and be saved. Debate

over this question was often both inter- and intradenominational. The standard view of Presbyterians was that baptism was essential, even for infants, to wash away original sin,¹¹² although some did teach otherwise.¹¹³ In contrast, the standard teaching for Methodists was that Adam's sin was immediately "canceled by the righteousness of Christ";¹¹⁴ however, Methodist teachings that infants still needed baptism made this an opaque issue. The majority opinions among Baptists and Universalists were more straightforward as they both asserted that Christ's grace expunged original sin without the need for any ordinance.¹¹⁵ The Book of Mormon seems to align more closely with the Baptists and Universalists, as Christ explains to Mormon that "little children are whole . . . ; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from [little children] in [him]."¹¹⁶

The words ascribed to Christ in the text also answer the question of children's capability of committing sin and the question of who needs repentance and baptism: "Behold, I came into the world not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; the whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore, little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin."¹¹⁷ Here Christ distinctly declares little children are incapable of committing sin. In contrast, ascertaining nineteenth-century denominational opinion on this question is quite vexed, particularly for denominations, such as Presbyterianism and Congregationalism, which ascribed most closely to Calvinist theology. While Methodists generally agreed that children were not moral agents capable of sin, and Baptists and Restorationists asserted that infants could not sin,¹¹⁸ Presbyterians and Congregationalists came from a lineage in which some theologians had attributed sins to infants.¹¹⁹ In the nineteenth century, such preachers as Leonard Woods and Timothy Dwight continued to teach that "children are . . . moral agents from the first" and humans "are also sinful beings in their infancy."¹²⁰ However, other Presbyterian and Congregational ministers—while vehemently asserting that "children are polluted . . . deprived from birth"¹²¹—did not weigh in on the question of children actually committing sin, but rather, focused instead on their polluted nature as a consequence of original sin. Mormon, in his letter to Moroni, expounds on Christ's words, teaching that repentance and baptism are only required of those "who are accountable and capable of committing sin."¹²² Likewise,

the angel speaking to King Benjamin makes it clear that little children are “found blameless before God.”¹²³ These Book of Mormon teachings accord most closely with Baptist and Restorationist thought.

However, in other aspects, the Book of Mormon’s teachings on infant baptism and salvation diverge from Presbyterians, as well as some Baptists, and align with ideas espoused by Universalists and some Methodists, as Mormon asserts that all children are “partakers of salvation.”¹²⁴ The Book of Mormon denounces strongly the more general idea of election held by Presbyterians and some Baptists when Abinadi declares that all those who hearken unto the prophets’ words are saved, along with little children and all those who never have “salvation declared unto them.”¹²⁵ Choice, actions, and knowledge are crucial determinants in Abinadi’s understanding of salvation, not predestination. Seeming to build on Abinadi’s teachings, Mormon further declares, “God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being,” nor a “respector to persons,” meaning that he judges them by their actions, not some a priori categories.¹²⁶ Consequently, all children must be “partakers of salvation” because they have not disqualified themselves by committing sin.¹²⁷ Such an assertion resonates well with teachings of Universalist John Murray as well as Methodist Richard Watson, who taught that since “there is no respect of person with God’ . . . it must follow that all infants are saved.”¹²⁸

How and why, then, is the universal salvation of infants possible? The Book of Mormon repeatedly asserts that it is because of the grace made possible through Jesus Christ’s Atonement. As the prophet Abinadi explains, “The atonement, which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people,” makes salvation possible.¹²⁹ Likewise, the angel reminds King Benjamin “that there shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.”¹³⁰ That Christ’s Atonement was what made salvation possible for infants as well as all others was almost universally accepted in nineteenth-century America; what denominations argued about was how children gained access to the saving grace made possible through the Atonement. For Presbyterians, baptism seemed to be required (or at least expected).¹³¹ For Methodists, all children who died “were sanctified by the blood of

the covenant, and saved by grace”; nevertheless, the sacrament of baptism was still recommended and highly preferred.¹³² For Baptists, baptism was unnecessary, but “the redemption of Christ must be applied by the Holy Spirit, to their purification from sin. Otherwise they would be incapable of eternal life.”¹³³ For Restorationists, “The sacrifice of Christ is sufficient for their salvation, independent of any deed or thought on the part of man.”¹³⁴ For Universalists, infants, like all other individuals, were saved through Christ’s atoning grace and resurrection.¹³⁵ Summarizing what his predecessors have already taught, Mormon asserts that “little children are alive in Christ” and that “they are all alive in him because of his mercy,” and then he does not offer any further explanation.¹³⁶

By repetitively linking infant baptism to a rejection of “the mercies of Christ,”¹³⁷ Mormon places Christ’s Atonement and grace at the center of the debate. Mormon explains that baptizing little children is “awful wickedness” and “solemn mockery before God” because it “denieth the mercies of Christ, and setteth at naught the atonement of him and the power of his redemption.”¹³⁸ Consequently, there can be no allowance for those who “pervert the ways of the Lord after this manner,” and Mormon warns, in language as scathing as that used by any nineteenth-century minister, that those who practice infant baptism “are in danger of death, hell, and an endless torment.”¹³⁹ At the center of Mormon’s commentary on Christ’s statement regarding infant baptism is a more significant explanation of God’s nature and Christ’s Atonement, grace, and ability to save all individuals. All other issues that his letter resolves, such as its repudiation of the connection between circumcision and infant baptism (that, significantly, lay at the center of most nineteenth-century infant baptism debates), pale in comparison.¹⁴⁰ Mormon, like Abinadi, keeps the focus on Christ and what he made possible. As Abinadi so eloquently states, “For were it not for the redemption which he hath made for his people, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, I say unto you, were it not for this, all mankind must have perished.”¹⁴¹

As this close analysis of the Book of Mormon’s teachings on infant baptism and salvation reveals, the Book of Mormon does not prescribe to or endorse any one of the dominant theological positions in early nineteenth-century America. Instead, the book clearly resonates with

different aspects of various denominational thought while also offering a more concise rationale for infant salvation and maintaining a focus on Christ's grace that is not seen in other denominations' treatises on the subject. Its ability to touch on many of the most pressing issues within the nineteenth-century debate, while constructing its own unique teaching on the subject as a whole, suggests a theological sophistication that has not often been granted to the Book of Mormon. Although placing the Book of Mormon's theology within its nineteenth-century context has many challenges from ascertaining other denominations' opinions on issues that were often contested to ascertaining the Book of Mormon's theological position given the range of voices that exist within it, such studies will invariably return rich dividends as the Book of Mormon contributes an amalgamated yet unique and sophisticated theology to nineteenth-century religious discourse.

NOTES

1. 2 Nephi 28:2–4; 2 Nephi 29:2; 1 Nephi 13:34–36, 40.
2. See for instance Mormon 8:34–35 (most explicitly), but also alluded to in 2 Nephi 28–30; Mormon 5:10–24; and Mormon 8:26–9:37.
3. Alexander Campbell, “The Mormonites,” *Millennial Harbinger* 2 (January 1831): 93.
4. See for instance Terryl Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 4–6; Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 98–117; Heikki Raisanen, “Joseph Smith und die Bibel: Die Leistung des mormonischen Propheten in neuer Beleuchtung,” *Theologische Literaturzeitung* (February 1984): 83–92; Jan Shipps, “The Prophet Puzzle: Suggestions Leading Toward a More Comprehensive Interpretation of Joseph Smith,” *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 11; and Grant Hardy, *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition* (University of Illinois Press, 2005), vii.
5. The one notable acceptance to this statement are two articles by Clyde D. Ford, “Lehi on the Great Issues: Book of Mormon Theology in Early Nineteenth-Century Perspective,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 75–96; and “The Book of Mormon, the Early Nineteenth-Century Debates over

- Universalism, and the Development of the Novel Mormon doctrines of Ultimate Rewards and Punishments,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 1–23. Besides these two articles only very brief mentions have been made in the following works: Thomas F. O’Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957), 28; Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1965), 81; William Alexander Linn, *The Story of the Mormons* (London: Macmillan, 1923), 93; and Timothy L. Smith, “The Book of Mormon in Biblical Culture,” *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 10.
6. Statistics taken from Samuel H. Preston and Michael R. Haines, *Fatal Years: Child Mortality in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 53. Looking more specifically at the area in which Joseph Smith lived, “a simple summing of available studies of infant mortality in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries show a mean urban rate of 189 and a rural rate of 192” for New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. See Billy G. Smith, ed., *Down and Out in Early America* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2004): 65.
 7. Mosiah 3:18.
 8. Mosiah 3:11.
 9. Mosiah 15:25.
 10. Mosiah 15:26–27.
 11. Moroni 8:9.
 12. The Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith—History 1:8, 5.
 13. For more information on the Second Great Awakening, see Barry Hankins, *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Religious Movement* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 11–16.
 14. For more information on the First Great Awakening, see Hankins, *American Evangelicals*, 3–11.
 15. E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (Ann Arbor, MI: Sheridan Books, 2003), 10.
 16. According to Holifield, prevenient grace refers to the idea that “every human being received a gift of grace, alluring though not compelling, that enabled the soul ‘to make that choice which is the turning point, conditionally, of the soul’s salvation.” Holifield, *Theology in America*, 264.
 17. Catherine L. Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2013), 94, 97.

18. For more information on Universalist belief, see Ann Lee Bressler, *The Universalist Movement in America, 1770–1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 4–8.
19. Curtis D. Johnson, *Islands of Holiness: Rural Religion in Upstate New York, 1790–1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 45–47.
20. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 14.
21. Richard Bushman's research supports Joseph Smith's description of the time: "Four churches met within a few miles of the Smiths' house. Presbyterians had the largest congregation in Palmyra village and in the 1820s the only meeting-house in the center. The Methodists, the next largest group, constructed a building of their own in 1822, followed by the Society of Friends in 1823. Two miles west of the village, a large congregation of Baptists had met in a meetinghouse since 1808." Richard Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Random House, 2005), 36.
22. For good charts that trace the growth of these three movements in late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century America, see Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 166, 169, 180–81.
23. I do not focus on Lutherans and Roman Catholics because, as Mark Noll explains, both of these groups were "still largely immigrant and relatively isolated." Noll, *America's God*, 167.
24. Christopher K. Lensch, "Presbyterianism in America: The Nineteenth Century," *WRS Journal* 13, no. 2 (August 2006): 17.
25. Noll, *America's God*, 229.
26. The Reformed tradition espouses sola scriptura, the unity of scripture, the sovereignty of God, man's total depravity, unconditional election, and the Atonement as necessary for salvation.
27. Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 99. The two groups would later separate in the late 1820s over a theological difference on the doctrine of original sin. For more information on this union see Lensch, "Presbyterianism in America," 16–25.
28. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 342.
29. For an overview of the diversity within these theological debates, see Holifield, *Theology in America*, 341–69.

30. Leonard Woods, *Lectures on Infant Baptism* (Andover, MA: Mark Newman, 1828), 210–11. See also Orin Fowler, *Mode and Subjects of Baptism* (Boston, MA: William Pierce, 1835), 103.
31. William Thomas Hamilton, *Infant Baptism: A Scriptural Ordinance* (Newark, NJ: William Tuttle, 1831), 45.
32. For examples of this argument see Woods, *Lectures*, 69; Hamilton, *Infant Baptism*, 42; and Samuel Miller, *Infant Baptism Scriptural and Reasonable* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1835), 16.
33. Fowler, *Mode and Subjects of Baptism*, 100.
34. Woods, *Lectures*, 40–41, 113; Fowler, *Mode and Subjects of Baptism*, 100; and Miller, *Infant Baptism Scriptural and Reasonable*, 34.
35. Miller, *Infant Baptism Scriptural and Reasonable*, 24. See also Woods, *Lectures*, 41–48; and Hamilton, *Infant Baptism*, 71–72.
36. Hamilton, *Infant Baptism*, 45.
37. Hamilton, *Infant Baptism*, 12; See also Fowler, *Mode and Subjects of Baptism*, 212; Miller, *Infant Baptism Scriptural and Reasonable*, 22.
38. See for instance Fowler, *Mode and Subjects of Baptism*, 103–5, 211–12; and Woods, *Lectures*, 93, 96. In the late 1820s and gaining momentum in the mid-nineteenth century, debate arose within Presbyterianism over infant salvation and baptism. Charles Finney, for instance, the most popular and influential revivalist in upstate New York in the mid-1800s, argued that infant baptism was not necessary for salvation although he still regularly baptized infants. Finney preached against the idea of a depraved human nature in infants and believed that the “sinful nature of an unborn child [was] impossible!” Finney further argued that the grace of God extended to infants so far that they did not have to be baptized for their sins because infants were not capable of committing sin. Finney preached that all infants were saved and that the “benevolence of God will take care of them. It is nonsensical to insist upon their moral depravity before they are moral agents, and it is frivolous to assert, that they must be morally depraved, as a condition of their being saved by grace.” See Charles Finney, *Systematic Theology* (London: William Tegg, 1851), 179, 185.
39. Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 97.
40. For a discussion of the rise of Methodism in eighteenth-century England, see Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1989), 291–305.

41. "Between 1770 and 1820 American Methodists achieved a virtual miracle of growth, rising from fewer than 1,000 members to more than 250,000. In 1775 fewer than one out of every 800 Americans was a Methodist; by 1812 Methodists numbered one out of every 36 Americans. By 1830 membership stood at nearly half a million. . . . This growth stunned the older denominations. At mid-century, American Methodism was nearly half again as large as any other Protestant body, and almost ten times the size of the Congregationalists, America's largest denomination in 1776." John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Enthusiasm and Early American Methodism, 1770–1820* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.
42. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 256.
43. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 110. Methodist circuit riders and revivalists were enthusiastic about their message, and although this religiosity was not unique to Methodism in America, "American Methodism was far more willing to embrace, advance, and exploit religious enthusiasm than was any other cohesive, large-scale religious movement of the early republic." Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 123. See also Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 110–11.
44. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 17.
45. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 261.
46. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 257.
47. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 16.
48. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 256, 261.
49. For more detail, see John Wesley, "A Treatise on Baptism," in *A Collection of Interesting Tracts, Explaining Several Important Points of Scriptural Doctrine* (New York: N. Bangs and J. Emory, 1825), 4–14.
50. Wesley, "Treatise on Baptism," 7.
51. Wesley, "Treatise on Baptism," 8.
52. John Wesley to John Mason, 21 November 1776, in Gayle Carlton Felton, *Gift of Water: The Practice and Theology of Baptism Among Methodists in America* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1992), 27.
53. Felton, *Gift of Water*, 48. For more on Wesley and infant baptism, see Felton, *Gift of Water*, 26–48.
54. Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship (Religion in America)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 99–100.
55. Felton, *Gift of Water*, 53.
56. Felton, *Gift of Water*, 74.

57. See for instance, Wilbur Fisk, *Calvinistic Controversy: Embracing a Sermon on Predestination and Election, and Several Numbers on the Same Subject* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1837), 183; and Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes or, a View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals, and Institutions of Christianity* (London, 1823), 57. See Felton, *Gift of Water*, 71–72, for more details.
58. Karen B. Westerfield, “Sacraments and Life-Cycle Rituals,” in *Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*, ed. by Jason E. Vickers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 138–55, 143; Felton, *Gift of Water*, 68; for specific examples, see H. S. Boyd, “Remarks on Infant Baptism,” in *A Collection of Interesting Tracts*, 290–92. See also Peter Edwards, “A Short Method with the Baptists,” in *Candid Reasons for Renouncing the Principles of Paedo-Baptism* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1841), 133–79; See also Wesley, “Treatise on Baptism”; and Wesley, “Thoughts on Infant Baptism” in *A Collection of Interesting Tracts*, 1–38. These tracts can all be found in *A Collection of Interesting Tracts, Explaining Several Important Points of Scriptural Doctrine*, which contained the church’s official position at the time.
59. For good historical overviews of Baptists in America, see Bill Leonard, *Baptists in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); and Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
60. Leonard, *Baptists in America*, 65.
61. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 274.
62. Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 119.
63. For a good discussion of this, see Holifield, *Theology in America*, 273–90.
64. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 290.
65. Leonard, *Baptists in America*, 142.
66. Robert E. Johnson, *A Global Introduction to Baptist Churches* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 393.
67. Abraham Booth, *Paedobaptism Examined: With Replies to the Arguments and Objects of Williams and Edwards*, vol. 3 (London: Ebenezer Palmer, 1825), 362.
68. Booth, *Paedobaptism Examined*, 354–55.
69. Peter Edwards, “A Short Method with the Baptists,” in *A Collection of Interesting Tracts, Explaining Several Important Points of Scripture Doctrine* (Troy, NY: 1805): 95–96. Peter Edwards was a Baptist preacher for several years before becoming a Methodist, so in this section, he is explaining the beliefs of anti-paedobaptists before making his argument for infant baptism. His tract was

- reprinted in the handbook that contained American Methodists' official statements on points of doctrine until 1832.
70. Edwards, "A Short Method with the Baptists," 96.
 71. Robert Boyte Crawford Howell, *Evils of Infant Baptism* (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1852), xiii–xiv.
 72. Howell, *Evils of Infant Baptism*, 110.
 73. Howell, *Evils of Infant Baptism*, 176, 180.
 74. For a brief overview of Campbell, see Robert E. Johnson, *A Global Introduction to Baptist Churches*, 145–46; and D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, and Paul M. Blowers, eds., *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2013), 9–12.
 75. Williams, Foster, and Blowers, eds., *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History*, 29–30; Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 122.
 76. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 292–93.
 77. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 302–3.
 78. Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, and D. Newell Williams, "Baptism," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster, Anthony L. Dunnivant, Paul M. Blowers, and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 57–67. Campbell differed, however, from not only the Baptists but also the other Restorationist leaders in his belief that "baptism conveyed the remission of sins. . . . The baptized need not indulge in anxious introspection. The ordinance itself brought assurance of favor with God." Holifield, *Theology in America*, 303.
 79. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 58.
 80. Williams, Foster, and Blowers, eds., *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History*, 22.
 81. Williams, Foster, and Blowers, eds., *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History*.
 82. Foster, Blowers, and Williams, "Baptism," 57–67.
 83. Alexander Campbell, *A Debate on Christian Baptism Between the Reverend W.L. Maccalla, a Presbyterian Teacher and Alexander Campbell* (Buffalo, NY: Campbell and Sala, 1824), 136.
 84. Campbell, *Debate on Christian Baptism*, 341.
 85. Campbell, *Debate on Christian Baptism*, 146, 59.
 86. Campbell, *Debate on Christian Baptism*, 228.

87. For more information on John Murray and the beginning of Universalism in America, see Holifield, *Theology in America*, 220–23. See also Bressler, *Universalist Movement in America*, 14–17.
88. Thomas Whittimore, “State of the Doctrine and Denomination of Universalists,” *The Expositor and Universalist Review* 1 (January 1833): 61. Cited in Ford, “Lehi on the Great Issues,” 3.
89. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 219.
90. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 221–23; Bressler, *Universalist Movement in America*, 14–18.
91. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 226–27.
92. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 229–30; Bressler, *Universalist Movement in America*, 23–29.
93. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 231.
94. Universalists have changed their view on baptism over the years. Baptism was fairly unpopular in the early nineteenth century, almost universal in the late nineteenth century, and less popular again in the twentieth century. For a good overview of Universalists’ changing views on baptism in the nineteenth century, see Lewis Perry, “Baptism on the Universalist Frontier,” *Journal of Unitarian Universalist History* 29 (2003): 3–18.
95. Hosea Ballou, *Nine Sermons* (Philadelphia, PA: Abel C. Thomas, 1835), 139–42.
96. Ballou, *Nine Sermons*, 142.
97. John Murray, *Letters and Sketches of Sermons*, vol. 3 (Boston, MA: Joshua Belcher, 1813), 345, 354, 261.
98. John Murray, *Letters and Sketches of Sermons*, vol. 2 (Boston, MA: Joshua Belcher, 1813), 367.
99. John Murray, quoted in G. L. Demarest, “John Murray,” *Universalist Quarterly and General Review* 25–26 (1868), ed. Thomas B. Thayer (Boston, MA: Universalist Publishing House, 1868), 462–75.
100. Felton, *Gift of Water*, 69. A more accurate understanding of Calvinism was simply that some infants, just like some adults, were among the elect and some were not; baptism in reality was a moot point. Nonetheless, the question of infant salvation and baptism was hotly debated in Calvinist circles, leading to a perpetual sense of uncertainty surrounding the issue. For more information, see Kathryn Gin Lum, *Damned Nation: Hell in America from the Revolution to Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 52.

101. See for instance Hamilton, *Infant Baptism*, 72–73; Felton, *Gift of Water*, 67–72; and Booth, *Paedobaptism Examined*, 66–67.
102. Mosiah 15:25.
103. Mosiah 15:22–25.
104. Mosiah 3:16–18, 21.
105. John Hilton III, “Abinadi’s Legacy: Tracing His Influence in the Book of Mormon,” herein.
106. See Mormon 8:26–41.
107. Moroni 8:7–8.
108. Moroni 8:8.
109. Bressler, *Universalist Movement in America*, 18.
110. “Anthropology,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas A. Foster, Anthony L. Dunnivant, Paul M. Blowers, and D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 30, 57–67.
111. Mosiah 16:3.
112. Woods, *Lectures*, 210–11; Fowler, *Mode and Subjects of Baptism*, 103; and Hamilton, *Infant Baptism*, 45.
113. See, for instance, note 33 on Charles Finney.
114. Wesley, as cited in Felton, *Gift of Water*, 27.
115. Howell, *Evils of Infant Baptism*, 176, 180; Bressler, *Universalist Movement in America*, 17–19.
116. Moroni 8:8.
117. Moroni 8:8.
118. Felton, *Gift of Water*, 71; Fisk, *Calvinistic Controversy*, 184–85; and Campbell, *Debate on Christian Baptism*, 136.
119. Campbell, *Debate on Christian Baptism*, 136; Edwards, “A Short Method with the Baptists,” 169; Fisk, *Calvinistic Controversy*, 184–185.
120. Leonard Woods, *An Essay on Native Depravity* (Boston: William Pierce, 1835), 169, 171; and Timothy Dwight, *Theology: Explained and Defended in a Series of Sermons*, 4 vols. (New Haven, CT: S. Converse, 1825), 1:177, as cited in Ford, “Lehi on the Great Issues,” 91.
121. Fowler, *Mode and Subjects of Baptism*, 103.
122. Moroni 8:10.
123. Mosiah 3:21.
124. Moroni 8:17.
125. Mosiah 15:22–26.

126. Moroni 8:18, 12, 17.
127. Moroni 8:17, 8.
128. Richard Watson, *A Biblical and Theological Dictionary* (New York: Waugh and Mason, 1833), 819.
129. Mosiah 13:28.
130. Mosiah 3:17.
131. Woods, *Lectures*, 210–11; Fowler, *Mode and Subjects of Baptism*, 103; and Hamilton, *Infant Baptism*, 45.
132. Watson, *Biblical and Theological Dictionary*, 57; Fisk, *Calvinistic Controversy*, 183; Wesley, “Treatise on Baptism,” 8.
133. Howell, *Evils of Infant Baptism*, 180.
134. Campbell, *Debate on Christian Baptism*, 228.
135. Bressler, *Universalist Movement in America*, 17–19; Murray, *Letters and Sketches of Sermons*, vol. 3, 261, 345, 354.
136. Moroni 8:11, 19.
137. Moroni 8:20, 23, 19.
138. Moroni 8:19, 9, 20.
139. Moroni 8:21.
140. Lengthy treatises exist on both sides of the argument, but Christ and Mormon quickly dismiss the issue through Christ’s statement that “the law of circumcision is done away in [him]” (Moroni 8:8) and Mormon’s expanded commentary.
141. Mosiah 15:19.