*Another Hebrew Breakthrough:*
# The Importance of Midrash

by Raymond C. Treat

The identification of midrash in the Book of Mormon by Angela Crowell is of utmost importance to all Book of Mormon believers. Midrash is an ancient Jewish pattern of commentary and instruction found in the Bible. Why is the discovery of this pattern in the Book of Mormon in 1991 so important? Because this discovery is part of the Lord's plan to reveal the ancient Hebrew nature—and therefore, the divinity—of the Book of Mormon in our day.

The Lord created time and has allotted a specific block of time for this earth and its inhabitants from creation to the final judgement. Regardless of appearances, the Lord is, and always has been, in complete control of the history of this earth.

For example, in his perfect timing, he raised up the Hebrew people, beginning with Abraham. He gave them their laws and their language. One of the things he told them to do was to observe certain feasts throughout the year (Leviticus 23).

The word feast in Hebrew means appointed time. We now know that the seven feasts of Israel are prophecies of important historical events in God's plan for the redemption of mankind. The first four feasts—Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits and Pentecost—have all been fulfilled to the letter in precise detail by the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and by the spiritual power bestowed on the day of Pentecost. The last three feasts—Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles—have yet to be fulfilled and are therefore prophecies of important future events.

The coming forth of the Book of Mormon was certainly one of the most important events in the plan of God for the last days. Joseph Smith, Jr. was first given custody of the Book of Mormon plates on September 22, 1827, the Feast of Trumpets in that year. One of the spiritual meanings of the Feast of Trumpets is a call to repentance in preparation for the Day of Atonement, a day of judgment. The coming forth of the Book of Mormon was certainly a call to repentance for all mankind. The Lord was saying to all, 'I am bringing forth more of my word. Repent and make full use of it because the day of judgment is coming.'

It is a matter of record that the Book of Mormon was first printed in March 1830. It is also a matter of record that the Lord chastised all Book of Mormon believers on September 22-23, 1832 (D&C 83:8) for treating the Book of Mormon lightly. Then three months later the Lord said "Behold, I will hasten my work in its time" (D&C 85:20a). It is also a matter of record that the Lord has done more for the Book of Mormon in the last twelve years than in the previous 150 years combined. Is this part of the hastening that the Lord promised in 1832? Many believe that it is.

The largest part of what the Lord has been doing with the Book of Mormon in the last twelve years is revealing its ancient Hebrew nature. The revealment of the Hebrew structure of the book began in earnest with John Welch's discovery of chiasmus, a type of Hebrew poetry. Angela Crowell has expanded this knowledge with her work on poetry, Hebraisms, sentence structure and now midrash.

It is clear that the Lord is giving us a message. He is telling us that he has a timetable and that we are rapidly approaching the final phase of the Lord's plan for the last days—the restoring of the covenants by reintroducing to the world the Book of Mormon, along with the rest of the word of God, in great power. Yes, this article on midrash is important. Of no less importance is our response to what the Lord is doing. ZRF

*. . . that they (the remnant of the house of Israel) may know the covenants of the Lord . . .*

# Midrash:
## Ancient Jewish Interpretation and Commentary in the Book of Mormon

### by Angela Crowell

The word "midrash" (derived from the Hebrew verb *darash*, "to search out") has been traditionally defined as rabbinic interpretation of the Old Testament.

Jacob Neusner, Graduate Research Professor in Religious Studies at the University of South Florida, and noted author, claims in his book *What is Midrash?* that "Midrash refers to the types of scriptural exegesis [scholarly interpretation] carried on by diverse groups of Jews from the time of ancient Israel to nearly the present day" (1987:8).

Since 1950, Biblical scholars have shown increased interest in identifying midrash in the Bible, and many Biblical passages have been identified as such. Today the term midrash is being applied by Biblical scholars to scriptural passages in both the Old and New Testament and the Qumran (Dead Sea) Scrolls.

In this article, we will extend its identification to the Book of Mormon. We will see examples of how midrash seeks to make the scriptural text from the past "understandable, useful, and relevant for a later generation" (Wright 1966:137).

### TYPES OF MIDRASH

Scholars have classified three types of midrash. The first type is called exegetical. This form is a verse-by-verse exposition (explanation) of individual books of the Old Testament. A second type called homiletic consists of sermons or discourses which expound texts or subjects in the Old Testament. The third type called narrative works "the interpretative material . . . into the biblical text to form a continuous narrative" (Wright 1966:128).

This article will concentrate on homiletic and narrative midrash that has been identified in the Bible and in the Book of Mormon.

### HOMILETIC MIDRASH
### The Proem and Yelammedenu Homilies

Two prominent sermon patterns have been identified in rabbinic literature: the proem and the yelammedenu. Both of these patterns have been identified in the New Testament and the Book of Mormon. "Proem" is a Greek word for "prelude." The proem homily (sermon), so-named because it begins with a key Old Testament introductory (proem) text, has a sermon built on the introductory text using additional texts in the exposition. The sermon closes with a final text which usually repeats or alludes to the initial text. Catchwords or keywords link the sermon together and are found in the initial and final texts, as well as in the exposition itself.

The yelammedenu homily has the same form as the proem except that it starts with a question or problem which is answered in the exposition (Ellis 1988:706).

### Proem Homily in the New Testament

E. Earle Ellis, Research Professor in Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has identified numerous examples of the proem homily pattern in the New Testament. One example is Romans 9:6-29:

**Initial Text/Theme:** Genesis 21:12 [21:10 IV] (Romans 9:6-8); catchwords: seed, children, called
**Second Text:** Genesis 18:10 [18:9, 10 IV] (Romans 9:9)
**Exposition:** Romans 9:10-28; additional citations (13, 15, 17, 25-28) linked to the initial text by catchwords: call, sons
**Final Text:** Isaiah 1:9 (Romans 9:29); alluding to the initial text with the catchword: seed (Ellis 1977:204)

Other examples Ellis has identifed as proem homilies are Hebrews 10:5-39 on Christ's sacrifice, 2 Peter 3:5-13 on the Day of the Lord and Matthew 21:33-44 [21:35-46 IV] on the Parable of the Landowner and Tenants (Ellis 1977:204-5). The identification of proem homilies in the New Testament attests to its traditional, widespread Jewish usage (Ellis 1988:706).

### Proem Homily in the Book of Mormon

Proem homily has also been identified in the Book of Mormon. Notice the impressive proem homily pattern of Jesus' sermon found in 3 Nephi 9:52-106:

**Initial Text:** Micah 5:8-9; 4:12-13 (3 Nephi 9:52-55); catchwords: midst, cut off, gather, people, together, Father, covenanted
**Exposition:** 3 Nephi 9:56-98; additional citations (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19; Genesis 22:18; Isaiah 52:1-15; 29:26; 66:19) linked to initial and final texts by catchwords: Father, people, covenant, midst, cut off, gather, together
**Final Text:** Micah 5:8-15 (3 Nephi 9:99-106); links the initial text and exposition with catchwords: people, midst, cut off, Father

Here Jesus' words are a remarkable example of a proem homily. More extended examples of proem homilies can also be found in the New Testament and the Book of Mormon. These will be identified as an extended commentary pattern.

## Extended Commentary Pattern in the New Testament

The Apostle Paul used an extended commentary pattern that is found in Romans 1:17-4:25. He used this technique of midrash to communicate his interpretation of scriptures:

**Initial Text:** Habakkuk 2:4 (Romans 1:17); catchwords: just/righteous, faith
**Exposition:** Romans 1:18-3:3; catchwords: to judge, just righteous, faith,
**Supplementary Text:** Psalm 51:6 (Romans 3:4); catchwords: righteous, to judge
**Exposition:** Romans 3:5-9; catchwords: righteousness, to judge,
**Supplementary Texts:** Ecclesiastes 7:20; Psalm 5:10; 14:1-3; Isaiah 59:7 (Romans 3:10-18)
**Exposition:** Romans 3:19-31; catchwords: righteous, righteousness, just/righteous, faith
**Final Text:** Romans 4:1-25; catchwords: righteous, righteousness, faith                    (Ellis 1988:708)

## Extended Commentary Pattern in the Book of Mormon

We find a similiar pattern in 2 Nephi 8:17-12:100. Here Nephi also used this technique of midrash to communicate his interpretation which, as Nephi tells us, was delivered through the spirit of prophecy (2 Nephi 11:6, 11, 18, 80; 12:79):

**Initial Text:** Isaiah 2-14 (2 Nephi 8:17-10:54); catchwords: mountain(s), secret, nation(s), knowledge
**Exposition:** 2 Nephi 11:1-81; catchwords: mountains, nation(s)
**Supplementary Text:** Isaiah 29:3-5 (2 Nephi 11:82-88); catchword: sealed
**Exposition:** 2 Nephi 11:89-116; catchwords: secret, nation
**Supplementary Text:** Isaiah 29:6-24 [29:6-32 IV] (2 Nephi 11:117-160); catchwords: reveal(ed), nation, sealed
**Exposition:** 2 Nephi 12:1-87; catchwords: nation(s), sealed, knowledge
**Final Text and Application:** Isaiah 11:4-9 (2 Nephi 12:88-100); catchwords: mountain, secret, revealed, nation, sealed, knowledge

## Yelammedenu Homily in the New Testament

Matthew 15:1-9 is an example of the yelammedenu homily. This type of homily begins with a question or problem that is answered in the exposition. Verse 2 begins with a question the Pharisees and scribes asked Jesus concerning his disciples transgressing the tradition of the elders. The organization of the rest of the homily then follows the same pattern as the proem homily:

**Question/Dialogue:** Matthew 15:1-3; catchwords: tradition, commandment
**Initial Texts:** Exodus 20:12; 21:17 (Matthew 15:4); catchword: honour
**Exposition/Application:** Matthew 15:5-6; catchwords: honour, tradition

**Final Text:** Isaiah 29:13 (Matthew 15:7-9) [15:7-8 IV]; catchwords: honoureth, commandments (Ellis 1977:206)

Other New Testament examples of yelammedenu homilies are the Parable of the Good Samaritan, found in Luke 10:25-37 [10:26-36 IV], where the final verse alludes to a second text. Another example is Jesus' response to the Pharisees' question about divorce, found in Matthew 19:3-8, which also has a concluding allusion to the initial text.

## Yelammedenu Homily in the Book of Mormon

A striking example of a yelammedenu homily is found in Mosiah 7:76-8:69. Here Abinadi answers King Noah and his priests' question in this ancient sermon pattern:

**Question/Dialogue:** Mosiah 7:76; catchwords: meaneth, words, taught
**Initial Text:** Isaiah 52:7-10 (Mosiah 7:77-80); catchwords: beautiful, mountains, feet, good tidings, peace, salvation, people, redeemed, earth
**Exposition:** Mosiah 7:81-8:46; counter questions and additional citations linked to the initial and final text by catchwords: teach, mean, taught, people, salvation, words, earth, redeem, peace
**Final Text/Application:** Isaiah 52:7-10 (Mosiah 8:47-69); catchwords: peace, good tidings, salvation, beautiful, mountains, feet, redeemed, people, earth

Note that in this yelammendenu pattern, Isaiah 52:7-10 is used for both the initial and final texts.

A second example of a yelammendenu homily pattern from the Book of Mormon is 1 Nephi 6:8-56. In this example Nephi teaches his brethren from Isaiah. The initial text is Isaiah 48:1-49. The question is found in 1 Nephi 7:1-2 where Nephi's brethren ask him the meaning of the Isaiah text. The exposition is 1 Nephi 7:3-68. Verse 69 has the concluding allusion to the initial text with the catchwords "commandment(s)" (also in 6:25) and "save(d)" (6:55).

## NARRATIVE MIDRASH

Narrative midrash occurs where an interpretation or text is added to another scripture text, forming an uninterrupted narrative. Unlike homiletic midrash, narrative midrash has been identified in the Old Testament, as well as the New Testament and the Book of Mormon.

George Wesley Buchanan, Professor of New Testament Studies at Wesley Theological Seminary, has identified both homiletic and narrative midrash. He states in his Anchor Bible Commentary *To the Hebrews* that the book of Hebrews (chapters 1-12) is homiletic midrash based on Psalm 110 (ix).

Buchanan pointed out in his paper, "Isaianic Midrash and the Exodus," presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (1990), that "unless all of this Isaianic literature can be proved to have been composed by later authors, midrashic literature was already an

accepted literary genre as early as the seventh or eighth century B.C. This fact has not been widely recognized."

Buchanan concluded: "This is only the tip of the iceberg. Midrashic composition was more widely practiced in the Hebrew Scriptures than anyone has imagined, but some will not be surprised. . . . This method deserves more attention than it has received."

### Narrative Midrash in the Old Testament

Both George Wesley Buchanan and James Sanders, Professor of Intertestamental and Biblical Studies at the School of Theology at Claremont, have identified Isaiah 43 as being narrative midrash on Exodus 15. Also, George Wesley Buchanan has identified Isaiah 12 as containing narrative midrash on Exodus 15, Psalms 88 and Psalms 104-105 (Buchanan 1990).

### Narrative Midrash in the Book of Mormon

Numerous examples of narrative midrash are found in 2 Nephi where Nephi works interpretative material into the Biblical text forming a continuous narrative. One specific example of narrative midrash is 2 Nephi 11:82-88 where Nephi interprets Isaiah 29:3-5.

## OTHER EVIDENCES OF MIDRASH

Similar homily patterns are found in the writings of Philo, a first-century Jewish writer, and in homiletic collections such as *Pesikta Rabbati*, which is "a seventh-century compilation of the teachings [of rabbis] of [the] third- and fourth-century" (Ellis 1957:142). Even though the rabbinic commentary patterns are dated later than the New Testament (third to sixth-century A.D.), Ellis believes they have a common root.

J. W. Bowker also has pointed out that patterns found in rabbinic literature could have originated much earlier (Bowker 1967:97). In other words, their traditions reach back earlier than their written documents.

## CONCLUSIONS

As Biblical scholars explore midrashic patterns found in the Bible, it is exciting to find that there are examples of authentic homiletic and narrative midrash in the Book of Mormon. These illustrations of midrash exhibit well-established ancient Jewish patterns of interpretation and exposition. These patterns, which are recognized by current Biblical scholarship, continue to clarify the ancient Hebrew literary structure of the Book of Mormon. ZRF

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