

Have There Been Any Latter-Day Parallels to Balaam's Blessing?

An Old Testament KnowWhy¹ relating to the reading assignment for Gospel Doctrine Lesson 16: "I Cannot Go Beyond the Word of the Lord" (Numbers 22-24; 31:1-16) (JBOTL16A)



Figure 1. Balaam Son of Beor Inscription from Deir 'Allah.² This fragment, dating to several centuries after the events of Numbers, recounts a night vision of Balaam, son of Beor, a "seer of the gods." Though the content of the vision has nothing to do with the Bible story, the text provides evidence that stories surrounding the figure of Balaam were known anciently outside the Bible among peoples who lived in the area east of the River Jordan.

Question: Have there been any latter-day parallels to Balaam's blessing?

Summary: In 1898, Dr. John M. Reiner, a Roman Catholic scholar, visited Utah. In a talk given at the Salt Lake Tabernacle at the invitation of President Wilford Woodruff, he described in striking terms the parallels he found between ancient and modern Israel. Throughout his talk, he wove in colorful and informative allusions to the story of Balaam, who had blessed Israel in spite of himself. Reiner also spoke vigorously of the strength of the claims of apostolic authority that, in his view, had been credibly put forth by only two churches: the Roman Catholics and the Mormons. Although not claiming the gift of prophecy, Reiner's eloquent words of appreciation and friendship for the Latter-day Saints were sincere and generous. His little-known discourse drawing out modern day parallels to the story of Balaam and Israel deserves to be better known.



Figure 2. Figurine of man on donkey reminiscent of Balaam³

The Know

The apostle Peter singled out Balaam's bad example⁴ as he warned his readers of two great sins to which they were particularly susceptible: greed and adultery. Balaam himself had fallen victim to the first sin. Then, having failed to curse Israel, Balaam incited Israel's fall to the second one. Specifically, ignoring the Lord's direct condemnation of his attempts to cash in on his prophetic gifts, Balaam could not bring himself to abandon his fruitless pursuit of Balak's promised reward. Though he had no doubt of Israel's divine destiny, he sought to weaken the people by promoting idolatry and fornication. In short, there was a great contradiction in Balaam's character: despite his prophetic gifts he proved persistently more blind, more irrational, and more ignorant than his speechless donkey, whose mouth the Lord was compelled to open to save the unseeing seer from his own myopic "madness."⁵ There was method in Balaam's "madness," but it was an evil method.



Figure 3. Purported Photo of Dr. John M. Reiner⁶

Not every Gentile who has looked on Israel has come with an intention to curse it. Perhaps the best example in modern times of an honest “Balaam” comes from Dr. John M. Reiner, a Catholic scholar⁷ who visited Salt Lake City in 1898. He was invited by Church President Wilford Woodruff to give a talk in the Tabernacle, which was delivered mostly extemporaneously to a crowd of about seven thousand.⁸

Dr. Reiner began his talk by a favorable comparison of Balaam’s view of the beauty of ancient Israel to what he had now seen of Mormonism. Reiner’s decision to cast himself in the role of a modern, unsponsored Balaam was no doubt a well-considered choice. Balaam-like, having witnessed firsthand the divine hand that directed modern Israel, he gave his blessing and left straightway. However, in contrast to Balaam, Reiner’s motives and friendship were sincere and generous, and so far as the currently available record shows, he never spoke a word against the people or teachings of the Latter-day Saints.

On January 22, 1898, the *Deseret News* had reported that Reiner had arrived in Salt Lake City “on private business about three weeks ago and at once became involved in an earnest and thorough investigation of the claims and principles of the Latter-day Saints.”⁹ During Reiner’s visit, he became acquainted with several prominent leaders and members of the Church.¹⁰ During one discussion, Elder Orson F. Whitney reported Reiner as giving this well-known statement about Latter-day Saint claims to apostolic authority:¹¹ “If we [i.e., the Catholic Church] have the apostolic succession from St. Peter, as we claim, there is no need of Joseph Smith and Mormonism; but if we have not that succession, then such a man as Joseph Smith was necessary, and Mormonism’s attitude is the only consistent one. It is either the perpetuation of the gospel from ancient times, or the restoration of the gospel in latter days.”

The full text of Reiner’s thoughtful and eloquent Tabernacle talk is reproduced below. Apart from the original record in the *Deseret News*¹² and a later appearance in Brian Stuy’s *Collected Discourses*,¹³ it seems to be unavailable. Though some of the specific expressions and illustrations Reiner uses to make his arguments reflect the times in which he lived and may seem ill-chosen to the modern reader, on the whole the discourse as it stands deserves to be better known.

“How Beautiful Are Thy Tents, O Israel” [Numbers 24:5]
Discourse Delivered by Dr. J. M. Reiner at Salt Lake City, Utah
January 16th, 1898

Elder Charles W. Penrose, at the request of Dr. Reiner, read the 24th chapter of Numbers. Dr. J. M. Reiner then spoke as follows:

How beautiful are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!

Thus spoke the false prophet when he went up on a mountain and looked down into the valley. If you could have followed the eye of that prophet you would have seen a valley where perpetual summer reigned. Many a tent was pitched there in the wilderness. Israel, by the direction of Jehovah, going through the wilderness, had taken a resting place there for a while. Everything was peaceful. Everything was united. God’s benedictions smiled upon them. They went in and out of their tents, doing their daily duties, by the word and direction of their great leader. As you looked down into that valley, you would have been cheered and edified to see a people, going in the wilderness, amid many deprivations, hardships, and troubles, and yet peaceful, contented, and hopeful.

While that went on in the valley, there was a conspiracy going on. Balak hired a false prophet to curse the people of Israel. It is usually the case, whenever there is a curse to be uttered against the Church of God, it is not by a man who is indignant against any false teaching or false living, but it is always an enemy who has been bribed, bought, his eyes shut, his heart corrupted, and led against his own will and wish and conviction to utter a curse.

Balaam was not willing to do it. He told the messengers of Balak that it was impossible for him to undertake that mission, because he could do nothing unless he received the approval of Jehovah. But Balak had invented all sorts of machinations to induce him to do it. He was willing to build altars; he was willing to bring sacrifices; he was willing to bribe that prophet, in order to accomplish his purposes against an innocent people.

Balaam goes up and looks down into the valley. Instead of uttering a curse he utters a benediction. He begins with these words: “How beautiful are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!”¹⁴

What do you think, my brethren, Balaam saw when he uttered that benediction in these words? He saw a people, to begin with, that were all united. There was no strife in sight. All of them were directed by one God. All of them looked toward God to give them direction what they should do. All of them knew that they had the laws which Moses gave them on Sinai — given by God, and not by man. He — Jehovah himself — was their lawgiver. There was no question as to whether or not these laws were proper; there was no question as to whether or not those laws were popular; they were divine, and that was sufficient.

Balaam looked down and he saw more than that. He well remembered that God said to them, “I will make thee a kingly priesthood, and a sanctified, a holy nation.”¹⁵ They were united; God was their lawgiver; and they were holy. He also knew that God gave His promise to Abraham that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed.¹⁶ Balaam well remembered that this nation, now wandering through the wilderness, forsaken and a prey to every enemy, was to be the nation out of which should come the Messiah, the Redeemer of the universe, our Divine Master, Jesus Christ himself.

How could he pronounce a curse upon such a people? How was it possible, where God has stamped His seal of approval upon it, where God has been the director and the very soul of that movement, that he should utter a curse? Nay, he could not do it. He tried his best; he was induced and bribed; but as he looked down into the valley he uttered the words that I have already repeated, “How beautiful are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!”¹⁷

This was not only the case, my brethren, with the ancient people of Israel; but as we follow along in history we find afterwards, in the fullness of time; after four thousand years of waiting; after the human race was trembling in the balance; after great philosophers were confused and perplexed; after Israel were singing, through their prophets, many a song of the coming Messiah; after all the nations were anxiously waiting for somebody to come who would clear away the mists which rested upon the human race, who would explain how men could be delivered from sin and from iniquity — after four thousand years God sent His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem the world.

When He sent His son upon earth it was not merely as a High Priest; it was not merely as a model lecturer — it was more than that: Christ came upon the earth with a revelation from the bosom of His Father to deliver to the whole human race. And then and there He established a Church upon the earth. He established in His Church Apostles, evangelists; He ordained some as Teachers, others as Prophets. There was a complete, full organization, equipped so that they might go out into the world and proclaim the glad tidings of the Messiah who had come.

In that Church you find the same thing. From time to time there was a hired, wicked man who was led on to curse the Church. Many an enemy surrounded the Church of God. A thousand times did she lay before the altar of God, crying aloud in anguish, “O Lord, have mercy upon me,”¹⁸ because the enemies had surrounded her. But she came out victorious. Why? Because the Church of God, in the early ages, was a Church that was united; it was a Church that was sanctified; it was a Church ready to spread the Gospel all over the world; and such a Church certainly could not be conquered. And Jehovah gave the promise, though His only Son, that even the gates of hell “shall not prevail against thee.”¹⁹

Now, my brethren, let me tell you that when we speak of unity in the Church, we do not mean by that something which is fabricated. You cannot fabricate unity in a church. Israel was united. Why? There was one lawgiver; there was one High Priest; there was one leader — Moses. They knew what God demanded of them; they knew their duties;

they knew where to go for counsel; they knew where to ask for advice; they knew that where there was a sick man the sick man went to the High Priest to be cleansed. Even in the time of our Lord, Christ said, after He had cured many a leper, "Go and show thyself to the Priest."²⁰

There was a bond of union, because God Himself had created it. They were sanctified; not sanctified merely in language, not by a fabrication, but they were sanctified because the law of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, if followed out, if lived out, could make of them holy men and women. They were a people that could withstand all attacks from without. Why? Because they had the power of God in their midst. That is — that was — the Church of God. That was the Church which Jesus Christ established upon the earth.

Let me be frank with you, my brethren. It would do not good if I were not. I feel, as I stand here to address you, that I stand in a holy place.²¹ Christ has told us, where two or three are gathered together in His name He will be in their midst.²² I said this was a Church of God. You might misunderstand me, and think that I am a Mormon. I were a hypocrite if I were to say that. Of course, according to my own belief, there is one church that makes that claim.²³ But what I mean to say to you is this: Here is the Mormon Church. Here is another tabernacle. Here also an Israel has spread and pitched its tents. And to my mind, your Church and the Roman church are the only two churches in the world today that make any real claim to Christianity.

I understand that a little while ago some ecclesiastical gentlemen in this city passed a resolution as to whether or not the Mormons are Christians — as if you might pass resolutions to say that a man's color shall change overnight! You might as well pass a resolution that a colored man shall become white, and a white man shall become colored, as to pass a resolution that a people be not Christians who bow their heads before Christ and who stand up and say, "We are the only Church." But these gentlemen say, "Resolved, that the Mormon Church are not Christians." Why, it is the height of absurdity; it is nonsensical, only fit for children!

The reason why I have been attracted by your Church, and most likely why the head of your Church²⁴ has honored me with the distinction and privilege to speak to you, is because your Church will at all times arrest the mind and the heart of a man whose heart burns with zeal for truth and who has got brain to think. I come into Salt Lake City, and everywhere I am surrounded by Mormons who tell me very flatly, "You have no authority; you have lost everything; we are the true Church." A man would commit a crime against his conscience, against his God, if he were not to stop and say to himself, "This is worth examining." I must investigate this. I cannot go from Salt Lake City back to New York and simply say, "I have been there and I heard something about the Mormons, and they have got some queer ideas in their heads." No; I must meet that Church face to face. I must know upon what they rest their claims and pretensions.

I do not say I am convinced of it. I say I am open for conviction. There is no truth upon earth which a man should not accept when proven; and there is no man upon earth who is too great to accept the truth, no matter whence it emanates.

Now, this Israel here in Utah — this new Israel, and this new Zion, there were many a man, many a Balaam, standing here to curse. Many indeed went out to curse, to scandalize, to criticize, with malicious motives. Far be it from me to utter a single word, either here in your presence or after I have left, which even you yourselves could object to from your own standpoint.

Now, here is the point. A church that makes claim to unity, a church that makes claim to sanctity, a church that makes claim to possess the authority from Christ, may be a true church. Which one is it? You say it is your Church; I say it is mine. But this is not a place for debate. This is a place where I mean to show you that over and over again the Church of God was to be cursed, but was blessed.

But her strength, her power was that she was one, that she had authority, that she had all the sacraments in her own possession. Even in the time of Israel, nobody could ever point the finger and say there was a heresy; nobody could say there was a false leader, a false prophet. If there was one, Israel knew it by the direction of God. If there was false living, Israel knew it by the direction of God. That, to my judgment and in my opinion, is a true Church of Christ. It is very marvelous indeed when a man goes out and mingles with the various Christian sects.

I have noticed a good many things which have impressed me very much. While lecturing on Thursday night to your students at one of your academies, in a little place called Ogden, I called their attention to a certain expression I heard; it is this: Language indicates something; it represents a certain institution.

Now, since I have mingled with Mormons I have heard over and over again, “That man is an apostate.” An apostate! Ah, yes. Why, no other modern church can use that language. A man may leave the First Presbyterian church to join the Fourth Presbyterian church; he may leave the Fourth Presbyterian to join the First Baptist church; he may leave the First Baptist church to join the Lutheran church; but he is not an apostate, he may merely be a man who has crossed from one street into another. He can never be an apostate. What should he apostatize from?

You ask those very men who passed resolutions as to who is to be a Christian or who is not to be a Christian, who is to be regarded as one that worships Christ or not — ask those very men, “Have you the truth?” “Well, yes — part; the other part is with my neighbor.” “Have you the truth?” “Well, yes, the essential truth we have.” “Have you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?” There is absolute silence, unless a voice comes from one corner of the Alps, from Rome, and says, “I have the truth,” and then it comes again from another corner of the world, in this new hemisphere — from Salt Lake City — where the head of your Church says, “We have the truth.” Or, as the venerable head of the Church said to me, “If you have any truth that I have not got, let me see it, and I will take it.” These are the two churches.

Now it makes no difference who the Balaam will be that will come to curse, be assured as long as you pitch your tents by the direction of God, as long as you have got the Lawgiver, God, as long as you claim to have authority, as long as you claim to have the

Priesthood, as long as you claim to have the sacraments, you may find a thousand enemies surrounding you and they will all have to pronounce a benediction upon you.

As I go through the arch here from time to time since my sojourn here in your midst I recall many a time I have walked through the catacombs in Rome by the side of a guide with a torchlight in his hand, pointing out here and yonder, "There lies one man," and "There another"; "There is the place where one of those who were slaughtered by the enemy of God is buried." As I go through this arch I feel that I am treading on a spot where your forefathers came in across the plains in order to pitch their tents in this modern Zion.

I went out purposely in the middle of the night, about 1 o'clock, when I was fatigued with writing. I took my overcoat and went out into the street, and passed by a little bit of an office. Stillness everywhere! There was a light in the office and it seemed to be as if it was a perpetual light burning in the temple of Vesta.²⁵ I stood there gazing upward, and saying to myself, "Here is a remarkable thing, a peculiar people." People came in here many a time to curse, many a time to condemn, and yet here they still live, here they still have got their tents, from here they are still proclaiming that they are the only true Church. That, my brethren, is your only strength in the world.

In my crossing the ocean about sixteen times I have met with many an accident, remember many a time of shipwreck, and I recall one instance when we had to turn around the ship and go back thirty-six hours. The captain stood there wet to the skin; every officer at his post; he was trembling lest something serious should happen, and he turned to the man at the helm, "How is it there?" A voice came, strong, positive, determined, "All is right here."

And so is the Church of God upon the earth. She is still upon the great ocean, shaken by every billow — by enemies, by misunderstandings. But the Great Captain cries back to the man at the helm — to those whom He left upon the earth, whom He has appointed to guide His people, to His authorities, and He asks, "How is it there?" "All right here!"

But alas! When I look around today in Protestant Christendom, I am almost tempted to say that the man who stands at the helm is a drunken, staggering sailor, with an unsteady hand, and he cannot make any response when this question comes to him.

I have in mind a very beautiful thing which is appropriate for your people, in the Talmud of Babylon. It pictures where a young woman in the bloom of life sits at her table, and it seems as if all her occupation is nothing else but reading some letters. The woman loves a man dearly, as dear as her life, who has left and gone into a far country. She heard nothing from him month in and month out, year in and year out, and he returned. Upon his return he found his beloved one still waiting for him. She received him; she was loyal as ever, true as ever, steadfast as ever. He said to her, "My beloved one, how is it that for these many years I have been away from you; you heard nothing from me; you did not know whether I remained loyal and true to you, and yet you are loyal and true to me." "Ah!" said she, "while you were away, and I was sometimes in anguish, and sometimes doubt crept into my soul, I took your love letters, I read those love letters of yours, and I

said to myself, the man who can write such letters is honest, is true, is loyal; he cannot lie, he will remain true as long as there is a breath left in him.”

And, says the Babylonian Talmud, in the last days God will say to His people, “O my people Israel, how was it? I have left you down on this earth, in the wilderness, in tribulation, often in agony, often in starvation, surrounded by enemies; how was it that you remained loyal, true, and steadfast to me?” And Israel will answer and say, “O thou Most High, while we were away from you; while we dwelt in the valley of tears; while many a time affliction visited us; while many a blow fell upon us; while our hearts were often torn; while darkness often covered our habitations, in those days we read your love letters, we read your promises, and we said, ‘A God that can thus speak to His people, a God that can make such promises as these, that God is true; His hand is not short to help; help will come sure; He will deliver His people from all anxiety.’”

And so, my brethren, with the Church of God. Permit me to say that you as a people, in your Church, when you are surrounded by enemies, when sometimes the hand of civil war is laid upon your head heavily, when sometimes you are misunderstood, when sometimes you suffer, then take the love letters of Him who has thus far guided your forefathers, who has thus far kept you, and be assured that a God who can thus speak, a God who can thus talk to His people, that God will remain true.

Let me say to you one word, in conclusion. You have heard the 24th chapter of Numbers read to you. Balaam came to curse, but Balaam did not curse — Balaam pronounced a benediction. The enemy who stands outside of the Church from without, that enemy you need never fear. But go on and read the 25th chapter, and what do you find there? Right after the enemy was conquered and blessed Israel, Israel forgot his God and committed sin, and Jehovah brought pestilence upon His own people.

The Church of God need never fear an enemy from without; but the enemy within your walls — he who walks with you side by side into your tabernacle or into your temple; he who makes the same profession; he who speaks the same language; he who pretends to have the same religion and to believe in the same revelation, and to be guided by the same authority, but whose heart is far from God and who lives an ungodly life, he is the worst enemy you have; and in due time, if you do not clear out your house from such people, God Himself will smite you with pestilence.

It is a remarkable thing, my friends, that this Zion should not be seen. I say this in all sincerity, and I say it, I trust to God, in the spirit of a real searcher for truth, it is a remarkable thing that the Balaams who are standing above should not be able to see you everywhere.

I cannot help but tell you a little private affair. But a few days ago, when the gentleman to my right [Elder James E. Talmage] came to my hotel, I told him a very remarkable incident. I had just then received a letter from my dear wife, saying to me “Do not be persuaded by those people to become a Mormon.” I then, with that letter in my pocket — and that seems like a very disobliging husband — went to see your venerable President, the very fountainhead of your Church upon this earth.

This morning, as I came back from Ogden, I had another letter, and for the first time I am told that two Apostles — maybe they were Elders — came to the city where I usually live in the summer time (and where we still have our home on account of my absence) and they asked the mayor of that city permission to preach, and he refused, and then they went and visited my own house.

I can assure you, in the presence of God, that if I were at home the mayor of that city would have trembled in his boots and he would have given permission. He has met me once before. There is not a single church in that city, with the exception of the Roman Catholic church, who can go in and say, like your Elders, “We are the true church, by direct revelation from God.” There are plenty of churches there who say, “We are a kind of a church, by the direction of John Knox, or John Calvin, or Martin Luther, or John Wesley”; but no man among them can go in there like those two apostles.

The remarkable incident is that in the day I am permitted to address this audience I receive a message that for the first time in our lives two Mormon Elders enter my humble abode and there try to speak the words of truth, as they understand it, to my wife.

I say to you that those Balaams who stand upon the mountain tops looking down into the valleys, there should be room that all of them should be able to see you. Your Church should be so situated that all men, the learned and the ignorant, the rich and the poor, should be able to approach it and see it as it really is.

I do trust and hope that if — IF! — you are really the true Church, then your light may shine before men, so that none of them shall be deprived of it. However, I am glad to say this: Whether you are or not, I must confess that I have traveled pretty nearly all over the world, but as a rule I never pay much attention whether a man says he is Presbyterian, or a Primitive Methodist, or a Wesleyan Methodist. It has no charm for me. But your humble missionaries buttonhole me everywhere, telling me they are the only true Church, and practically I as a Christian have no right to exist in it and I stand aghast and look. Therefore, my attention is arrested, and therefore I examine.

What the result will be, God only knows. But let me say to you that your hospitality, your conduct of life, the devotion of your missionaries, their loyalty, their simplicity of faith, is something which I admire, admire more than I can express in words.

And I do hope and pray that whatever has taken place in this tabernacle and all that has surrounded me may in the end result that it shall come a blessing to me and to you.

Yes, that no Balaam may enter your gates, unless when he returns he may also exclaim, like Balaam of old, “O how beautiful are they tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!”



Figure 4. Tents atop the DR Congo Kinshasa Temple shield roofers from the sun.²⁶

The Why

Though King Agrippa was almost persuaded to become a Christian by the eloquent discourse of Paul,²⁷ King Balak was unmoved by the divinely inspired prophecies of Balaam. In furious displeasure, Balak struck his hands together and angrily reprimanded the hired diviner for his failure: “I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times.”²⁸

Robert Alter sees Balak’s concluding words as the very crux of the story:²⁹

He assumes that he can employ Balaam as a technician of the realm of spirits to put a hex on his enemies. The emphatic point of the story is that God alone controls human destiny, and man has no independent power to impose curses or blessings.

Likewise, any who come to curse modern Israel should study the wise counsel of Gamaliel:³⁰

Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:
But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

The Lord Himself testified of the destiny of modern Israel when He declared:³¹

As well might man stretch forth his puny arm to stop the Missouri river in its decreed course, or to turn it up stream, as to hinder the Almighty from pouring down knowledge from heaven upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints.

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Further Study

For an excellent description of lessons that can be learned from the story of Balaam, see B. R. McConkie, *Story*, a reference cited in the Old Testament Gospel Doctrine Manual.

For discussion of favorable and unfavorable reactions to Joseph Smith's claim of apostolic authority from his contemporaries and some modern scholars (i.e., John M. Reiner and Stephen H. Webb), see J. M. Bradshaw, "*There's the Boy*".

For other scripture resources relating to this lesson, see The Interpreter Foundation Old Testament Gospel Doctrine Index (<http://interpreterfoundation.org/gospel-doctrine-resource-index/ot-gospel-doctrine-resource-index/>) and the Book of Mormon Central Old Testament KnoWhy list (<https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/tags/old-testament>).

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Endnotes

1 Used with permission of Book of Mormon Central. See <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/reference-knowhy>.

2 Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com, published in R. D. Cole, Numbers (Zondervan), p. 381.

3 Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com, published in *ibid.*, p. 380.

4 2 Peter 2:15.

5 The KJV says that Balaam “was rebuked for his iniquity [by] the dumb ass speaking with man's voice” (2 Peter 2:16). See also 2 Peter 2:12, where Peter calls the ungodly “natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed.”

6 Source unknown and identity of the subject unverified.

7 Reiner was a convert to Catholicism from Judaism (Professors Wrote Letters, Professors Wrote Letters). Elder B. H. Roberts gives further background in an entry from his journal (J. Sillito, *History's Apprentice*, 14 January 1898, p. 312): “R[einer] was a graduate from 3 universities — in [his] youth in Turkish army as a chaplain, 17 years Protestant preacher in Germany, 3 y[ea]rs without ch[urch] connection, subsequently joined Catholic Ch[urch] of wh[ich] now a lay member. [I]s married — no children.”

Reiner joined the faculty at the Roman Catholic Augustinian College at Villanova, Pennsylvania in 1901, and is listed in 1904-1905 with the following credentials: “Ph.D., LL.D., Professor of Civics. History and History of Philosophy” (E. F. Jenkins, *History*). He remained on the faculty until his retirement.

In an article in the *New York Times*, Reiner is characterized as a “famed biblical scholar” (Professors Wrote Letters, Professors Wrote Letters). He was eloquent and vigorous in his defense of his views, and not afraid of confrontation (see, e.g., J. M. Reiner, *Books of the Wars*). A departmental history reported: “He was a very influential man: Father Delurey had a high opinion of him and sought his advice on many things” (E. F. Jenkins, *History*). By the end of his first year as a faulty member, Reiner was a sufficiently prominent figure among the “most distinguished figures of the Catholic church, representatives of foreign nations, and of bench and bar” who were present at the university on June 18, 1902 to have been named as the one who accompanied United States President Grover Cleveland when he came to Villanova to receive an honorary doctorate (Catholic College, Catholic College).

8 The Deseret News reported Impressive Service, Impressive Service:

The services in the tabernacle on last Sunday afternoon were unusually interesting and impressive. The address delivered by Dr. J. M. Reiner was quite out of the usual order and was listened to with profound attention by the large audience, estimated to number about seven thousand people. The chapter in the Bible which was read as a text was selected by the speaker only a few minutes before the commencement of the service and most of his discourse was wholly extemporaneous. It abounded in striking passages and the candor which characterized it won the sympathy of the listeners.

Remarks by Elder Charles W. Penrose and President Wilford Woodruff followed Dr. Reiner's discourse A. Winter, President Wilford Woodruff (16 January 1898); A. Winter, Elder Charles W. Penrose (16 January 1898)). In his remarks, President Woodruff said of his personal visit with Reiner and the discourse that he had just delivered: “I was much pleased with my interview with our friend, and I have been pleased with his address here today. I do not feel to find any fault with it.”

9 Impressive Service, Impressive Service. According to the article, Dr. Reiner was hosted by “Mr. John Beck.”

10 D. B. Horne, *Life of Orson F. Whitney*, p. 181, citing a journal entry for 18 January 1898. Besides Elder Orson F. Whitney, these included Elder James E. Talmage, Elder Charles W. Penrose, Dr. Karl G. Maeser, Elder J. Golden Kimball, Professor Douglas Todd, and Brother Fred Pieper (J. Sillito, *History’s Apprentice*, 12 January 1898, p. 311; 13 January 1898, p. 311; 14 January 1898, p. 312; 15 January 1898, p. 312; 16 January 1898, p. 312; 22 January 1898, p. 315; 23 January 1898, p. 316). According to Elder Roberts, Brother Pieper had known Dr. Reiner “for some years,” having been introduced by Brother Richard Haag, whose wife “was once [a] member of Dr. R[einer]’s congregation in Stuttgart, Germany” (*ibid.*, 14 January 1898, p. 312).

Later, Reiner had a personal visit with President Wilford Woodruff (A. Winter, Dr. J. M. Reiner (16 January 1898); A. Winter, President Wilford Woodruff (16 January 1898)).

Subsequent correspondence of Dr. Reiner and Elder B. H. Roberts was published in the *Improvement Era* (B. H. Roberts *et al.*, Dr. John M. Reiner; B. H. Roberts *et al.*, Reiner-Roberts). See also Elder Roberts’ reference to Reiner’s discourse in B. H. Roberts, *Mormonism and Christianity*, p. 384.

11 See, e.g., O. F. Whitney, *Thoughts*, pp. 267-268; O. F. Whitney, *Strength*, p. 6; O. F. Whitney, *Through Memory’s Halls*, pp. 222-223 [reprinted in L. Richards, *Marvelous* (1950), p. 3; D. B. Horne, *Life of Orson F. Whitney*, p. 182]). Elder Whitney’s biographer Dennis B. Horne identified the Catholic scholar mentioned in this anecdote as Dr. John M. Reiner (*ibid.*, p. 181). Elder Whitney’s full account reads:

Many years ago a learned man, a member of the Roman Catholic Church, came to Utah and spoke from the stand of the Salt Lake Tabernacle. I became well-acquainted with him, and we conversed freely and frankly. A great scholar, with perhaps a dozen languages at his tongue’s end, he seemed to know all about theology, law, literature, science and philosophy. One day he said to me: “You Mormons are all ignoramuses. You don’t even know the strength of your own position. It is so strong that there is only one other tenable in the whole Christian world, and that is the position of the Catholic Church. The issue is between Catholicism and Mormonism. If we are right, you are wrong; if you are right, we are wrong; and that’s all there is to it. The Protestants haven’t a leg to stand on. For, if we are wrong, they are wrong with us, since they were a part of us and went out from us; while if we are right, they are apostates whom we cut off long ago. If we have the apostolic succession from St. Peter, as we claim, there is no need of Joseph Smith and Mormonism; but if we have not that succession, then such a man as Joseph Smith was necessary, and Mormonism’s attitude is the only consistent one. It is either the perpetuation of the gospel from ancient times, or the restoration of the gospel in latter days.”

Elder Whitney records his reply to Reiner as follows: “I agree with you, Doctor, in nearly all that you have said, but don’t deceive yourself with the notion that we ‘Mormons’ are not aware of the strength of our position” (O. F. Whitney, *Thoughts*, p. 268). See also Elder Whitney’s report of a similar nature of an encounter with an Episcopal bishop who told him that “the Episcopalians have an unbroken succession of authority all down the centuries, and if Joseph had formed their acquaintance, he never would have gone to the trouble of organizing another church” (*ibid.*, p. 269).

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- 12 A. Winter, Dr. J. M. Reiner (16 January 1898).
- 13 J. M. Reiner, How Beautiful.
- 14 Numbers 24:5.
- 15 See Exodus 19:5-6; 1 Peter 2:9.
- 16 See Genesis 18:18; 22:18.
- 17 Numbers 24:5.
- 18 See, e.g., Psalm 6:1-7.
- 19 Matthew 16:18.
- 20 See Matthew 8:4; Mark 1:44.
- 21 See, e.g., 2 Chronicles 35:5; Psalm 24:3; Matthew 24:15.
- 22 See Matthew 18:20.
- 23 I.e., the Roman Catholic Church, to which Reiner belonged.
- 24 President Wilford Woodruff.
- 25 “Vesta is the virgin goddess of the hearth, home, and family in Roman religion. She was rarely depicted in human form, and was often personified by the fire of her temple in the Forum Romanum. Entry to her temple was permitted only to her priestesses, the Vestals, who tended the sacred fire at the hearth in her temple.”
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vesta_\(mythology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vesta_(mythology)) (accessed April 24, 2018).
- 26 Photograph by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, 23 April 2018.
- 27 Acts 26:28.
- 28 Numbers 24:10.
- 29 R. Alter, Five Books, Kindle Edition, Locations 16171-16173.
- 30 Acts 5:38-39.
- 31 D&C 121:33.