The Liahona
Miracles by Small Means

Chapter 14
Chapter 14: Some final thoughts. As I come to the end of this presentation, I would like to leave you with a few thoughts or perspectives beyond what I have presented.
This is a picture of William Gilbert. He was born in 1544, and went on to become an English scientist and physician. He is credited by many as the "father of electricity and magnetism." He spent 17 years conducting experiments to clarify his understanding of the compass and the phenomenon of magnetism.
Gilbert found that an iron oxide rod, if heated to be red hot (much as if it were hit by lightning), was capable of being magnetized by just cooling while pointing in a north-south direction. He also observed that the iron rod could become magnetized by stroking it with lodestone.
Gilbert observed that magnetic forces had polarity and this led him to propose that the earth was magnetic and had polarity corresponding to its north and south poles. He also observed that magnetic forces often produce circular motions—thus he began to connect magnetism with the rotation of the earth.
Interestingly, Gilbert's ideas subsequently inspired the astronomer Galileo to support the Copernican theory that the earth spins and orbits around the sun. Unfortunately, this countered the prevailing teachings of the Catholic Church that the earth was stationary and the Sun revolved around the earth.
Galileo was soon reprimanded by the Catholic Church in 1616. The case against him rested on the interpretation of scripture. The Inquisition read to him from Psalm 104, verse 5 QUOTE "the Lord set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved." Although Galileo argued that this verse as well as others could be interpreted in a number of ways, the Inquisition ordered Galileo to abandon his ideas because they were QUOTE "altogether contrary to Holy Scripture." Galileo said he would comply. Galileo continued to write, although with care to avoid criticism, yet in 1633 he was brought to trial in Rome for heresy. He was convicted and sentenced to prison. The sentence was subsequently commuted to house arrest for the rest of his life.
Today we know that magnetic polarity is at the core of molecular structure--at the core of life itself.
We also know that the planets do indeed revolve around the sun according to the laws of attraction.
PREPARED BY THE HAND OF THE LORD

So one might truly say that the principles behind a magnetic Liahona could be considered to be QUOTE prepared by the hand of the Lord. Although they are grand principles and celestial in nature, nevertheless they can be looked at as truly small means that bring about great things.
Now to miracles, or at least some miracles. From the time of the great apostasy after Christ established his Church during the Meridian of time until the Restoration in the Latter-days, there were no true temples built and dedicated to the Lord.
From 1836 to the 1980s, about 47 temples were constructed.
During President Hinckley's tenure, however, he built 77 temples world-wide and had another 13 under construction. When viewed in the light of scriptural history, one might look at this as a miracle--not only for the number of temples constructed, but for the manner in which it facilitated the transformation of the LDS Church to become a world-wide church.
This temple building was a literal fulfillment of the prophetic words spoken in earlier times that temples would dot the earth.
Now if I were to propose that President Hinckley forged his own hammer and personally built these temples himself, you would think it an insult to your intelligence. Yet at the same time, isn't there a tendency among some to imagine Nephi forging his own hammer and personally building and launching a very complex, multi-ton ship? Relatively speaking, the construction of Nephi's ship would have required every bit as much skilled training and expertise as the construction of modern-day temples. So if it is okay for President Hinckley to seek outside expertise to accomplish his miracle, was it not okay for Nephi to have done the same?
Lehi’s Family (and the Liahona)

This is a picture of Lehi (with the Liahona in his hand) and his family sailing to the Promised Land. This picture hangs in my office and has helped to keep me motivated during my 22-year search for answers on the cultural aspects of the Book of Mormon.

When I ponder how Nephi’s boat or Nephi’s Liahona came to be, for me it is miraculous enough that there might have existed unique locations during this time where all the necessary construction materials, all the necessary construction expertise, and all the necessary ocean-going navigational knowledge were present for Nephi’s use and direction on a transoceanic journey. Was the inspiration of the Lord part of this miracle? Unquestionably, at every step in the construction process and also the navigation process. Yet even though Nephi understood that he needed that inspiration, I believe Nephi also realized that he needed to do everything that he could personally do in regards to accomplishing the things which the Lord had commanded. (2 Nephi 5:??) While we might tend to look for immediate miracles that appear to be grand and magical, I believe that most miracles occur almost daily by small means, and that their accumulative effects become grand when looking back in time. As Alma said to his son Helaman in regards to Lehi’s family and the Liahona, QUOTE "therefore they had this miracle, and also many other miracles wrought by the power of God, day by day." (Alma 37:40)
In closing, while I do not claim to have provided a definitive answer as to whether the Liahona was, in part, magnetic, I would hope that what I have presented has broadened your perspectives and increased your motivation to study the Book of Mormon scriptures in a cultural and historical manner, especially in relation to the Liahona. Thank you all again for your time.