KnoWhy #304 - Why Did Nephi Say An Angel Had Revealed The Name Jesus Christ?

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Abstract: In 2 Nephi 25:19, Nephi says that angel had previously revealed the name Jesus Christ. Evidence from the Original Manuscript suggests that Nephi was probably referring back to 1 Nephi 12:18, when the angel guiding him through his vision mentioned the "Jesus Christ, which is the Lamb of God."

Vision of Christ's Life Paiting by Jorge Cocoa

Why Did Nephi Say an Angel Had Revealed the Name Jesus Christ?

"And according to … the word of the angel of God, his name should be Jesus Christ the Son of God."
2 Nephi 25:19[1]

The Know

As Nephi interpreted the long block of Isaiah he had just cited (2 Nephi 12–24; cf. Isaiah 2–14), he mentioned that the Savior's "name should be Jesus Christ the Son of God," and that this was "according to … the word of the angel of God" (2 Nephi 25:19). In the past, commentators have assumed that Nephi was referring back to when Jacob said, "it must needs be expedient that Christ—for in the last night the angel spake unto me that this should be his name—should come among the Jews" (2 Nephi 10:3).[2] "Note, however," cautioned Royal Skousen, "that Jacob does not mention Christ's personal name, Jesus."[3]

Skousen went on to explain, "the angel told Jacob that the Messiah's name would be Christ, which is not the same as Jesus Christ."[4] But when did "the word of the angel of God" reveal the name Jesus Christ, if it wasn't

during the angel's revelation to Jacob, mentioned in 2 Nephi 10:3?[5] According to Skousen, the editor of the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project,[6] "the first occurrence of the name Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon text" was originally written in 1 Nephi 12:18, which spoke of "the sword of the justice of the Eternal God and Jesus Christ, which is the Lamb of God."[7]

Jesus Christ appears at 1 Nephi 12:18 in both the original and printer's manuscripts as well as the 1830 edition.[8] It was not until 1837 that Joseph Smith edited it to say Messiah,[9] a reading that has continued to the present in the official editions of the Book of Mormon. Significantly, as Skousen pointed out, 1 Nephi 12:18 provides "a direct quote of the angel's words to Nephi."[10] Skousen further explained:

[In 2 Nephi 25:19] Nephi specifically refers to the fact that the angel of God revealed the name of the Messiah and that his name would be "Jesus Christ the Son of God". And *Jesus Christ* is precisely what the angel in 1 Nephi 12:18 gives as the name of the Lamb of God.[11]

"Thus," Skousen concluded, "the original use of *Jesus Christ* in 1 Nephi 12:18 is crucial to understanding the later reference in 2 Nephi 25:19."[12]

The Why

It is uncertain why Joseph Smith amended 1 Nephi 12:18 to say "the Messiah" instead of Jesus Christ.[13] Clearly, it makes no substantive difference in the meaning of the passage—both *Messiah* and *Jesus Christ* refer to the same person, who is the Savior and Redeemer of the world. So neither reading is a mistake or incorrect. Yet this change illustrates that even when variant readings make no difference in meaning, they can answer some questions, and being aware of them can be helpful.

There are over 100 name-titles used for Christ in the Book of Mormon.[14] With such a variety of epithets for the Savior at their disposal, different Nephite writers showed preferences for different name-titles.[15] Understanding what these preferences were, as well as the meaning of each of Christ's names, often sheds light on the specific ways individual authors related to and understood the Savior.[16] This requires knowing what name-titles the original authors used, as can best be determined through the English translation.

Whatever the name was which originally got translated as *Jesus Christ* in 1 Nephi 12:18—possibly the Hebrew *Yeshua haMashiah*—the angel's use of it had an impact on Nephi.[17] He remembered and wrote it down, but then chose not to use it again until he was nearly finished with his record, after quoting extensively from Isaiah. Then, after reintroducing the name and reminding readers that an angel had revealed it, Nephi went on to use both *Jesus* and *Christ* together 5 more times, and the name *Jesus* alone appears another 3 times.[18]

Perhaps Nephi chose to begin using the name during his commentary on Isaiah because, in Hebrew, "The names 'Jesus' and 'Isaiah' are similar in form and meaning."[19]

Both names are based on the root word *yasha*, meaning salvation. It thus may not be a coincidence that right after Nephi reminded readers of the angelically revealed name *Jesus Christ*, Nephi taught the most central doctrine of the Gospel: "there is none other name given under heaven save it be this *Jesus Christ*, of which I have spoken, whereby man can be *saved*" (2 Nephi 25:30).

By the time he was finishing his record, the name *Jesus* apparently came to have particular significance for Nephi—perhaps because of the way his family had been saved from destruction and exile. In his closing testimony, Nephi wrote, "I glory in *my* Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell" (2 Nephi 33:6).[20]

Further Reading

Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part One, 1 Nephi 1–2 Nephi 10*, The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project, Volume 4 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 258–259.

John W. Welch, "Ten Testimonies of Jesus Christ from the Book of Mormon," in *Doctrines of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Bruce A. Van Orden and Brent L. Top (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1992), 223–242.

Edward J. Brandt, "The Name Jesus Christ Revealed to the Nephites," in *Second Nephi, the Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., The Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 3 (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 201–206.

Notes

1. Wording and punctuation varies slightly from the standard LDS edition of the Book of Mormon, and instead follows Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 132. For the reasons for this change, see Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part Two, 2 Nephi 11–Mosiah 16*, The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project, Volume 4 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 820–821.

2. See, for example, Monte S. Nyman, *Book of Mormon Commentary*, 6 vols. (Orem, UT: Granite Publishing, 2003), 1:600–601. Edward J. Brandt, "The Name *Jesus Christ* Revealed to the Nephites," in *Second Nephi, the Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., The Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 3 (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 202–203 treated 2 Nephi 10:3 and 2 Nephi 25:19 as separate revelations, and regarded 2 Nephi 10:3 as the first occurrence of *Christ* and 2 Nephi 25:19 as the first occurrence of *Jesus*. In his class lectures, Hugh Nibley asserted that 2 Nephi 25:19 is the first occurrence of *Christ*. Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. (American Fork and Provo, UT: Covenant Communications and FARMS, 2004), 1:261.

3. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part One, 1 Nephi 1–2 Nephi 10*, The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project, Volume 4 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 259.

4. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants, Part 1*, 259.

5. On this revelation, see Book of Mormon Central, "Why Does an Angel Reveal the Name of Christ to Jacob? (2 Nephi 10:3)," *KnoWhy* 36 (February 18, 2016).

6. For background on this project, see Royal Skousen, "Towards a Critical Edition of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30, no. 1 (1990): 41–69; Royal Skousen, "History of the Critical Text Project of the Book of Mormon," in *Uncovering the Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: History and Findings of the Critical Text Project*, ed. M. Gerald Bradford and Alison V. P. Coutts (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 5–21; Royal Skousen, "A Brief History of the Critical Text Work on the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 8 (2014): 233–248; Royal Skousen, "Restoring the Original Text of the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 14 (2015): 107–117.

7. Skousen, ed., *The Earliest Text*, 32. *Sword* (in place of *word*) is also a restoration of an original reading, found only in the original manuscript. See Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants, Part 1*, 257–258. See also, Royal Skousen, "Some Textual Changes for a Scholarly Study of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2012): 102–103; Royal Skousen, "The Original Text of the Book of Mormon and Its Publication by Yale University Press," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 7 (2013): 80–81; Skousen, "History of the Critical Text Project," 15; Royal Skousen, "The Systematic Text of the Book of Mormon," in *Uncovering the Original Manuscript*, 49.

8. This is most clearly noted in Skousen, ed., *The Earliest Text*, 748. See also Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants, Part 1*, 258. The reading of the original manuscript can be verified in Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extent Text, The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project*, Volume 1 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001), 111. For the printer's manuscript, see Royal Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts—Part One, 1 Nephi 1–Alma 17*, The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project, Volume 2 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001), 88; Royal Skousen and Robin Scott Jensen, eds., *Revelations and Translations Volume 3, Part 1: Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi 1–Alma 35*, The Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City, UT: Church Historian's Press, 2015), 57.

9. While preparing the 1837 edition, Joseph Smith actually edited the printer's manuscript to say *Mosiah*, which then got typeset as *Messiah*. See Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants, Part 1*, 259.

10. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, Part 1, 258.

11. Skousen, Analysis of *Textual Variants*, Part 1, 258–259.

12. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants, Part 1*, 259. This connection between the original reading of 1 Nephi 12:18 and 2 Nephi 25:19 was actually noted in 1993 in Brent Lee Metcalfe, "The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1993), 429–432. However, Metcalfe, a skeptic of Book of Mormon historicity, made the somewhat odd argument that the angelic revelation of the name *Jesus Christ* in 1 Nephi 12:18 somehow "exposes difficulties" for explanations that the term *Christ* "should not be viewed as anachronistic because it is prophetic" (p. 429). For responses to Metcalfe's arguments regarding the use of *Christ* and *Jesus Christ* in the Book of Mormon, see John A. Tvedtnes, review of *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, edited by Brent Lee Metcalfe, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 6*, no. 1 (1994): 49–50; Matthew Roper, "A More Perfect Priority?" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 6*, no. 1 (1994): 366–367.

13. Although in *Analysis of Textual Variants* (p. 259), Skousen speculated as to why this change was made, he later explained that "we can't be absolutely sure what was in Joseph Smith's mind" as he made this and other changes. Royal Skousen, "Changes in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 169.

14. On the number of names of Christ in the Book of Mormon, see Susan Easton Black, *Finding Christ Through the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1987), 16–18; Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1997), 353–355; Susan Easton Black, "Jesus Christ, names of," in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003), 457–458.

15. John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), charts 44–47.

16. See John W. Welch, "Ten Testimonies of Jesus Christ from the Book of Mormon," in *Doctrines of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Bruce A. Van Orden and Brent L. Top (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1992), 223–242.

17. On the Hebrew for *Jesus Christ*, see D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse-by-Verse: The Book of Mormon*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2011), 1:227.

18. For *Jesus Christ*, see 2 Nephi 25:20; 26:12 (2x); 30:5 (2x). For only *Jesus*, see 2 Nephi 31:10; 33:4, 6.

19. Margaret Barker, "Isaiah," in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 490. *Yesha'yahu* (Isaiah) is composed of *yesha*, which means "help, deliverance, salvation," and then the theophoric *yahu*, meaning *Yahweh*. *Yeshua* (Jesus) is another form of the name *Yehoshua* (Joshua) and likewise derives from *yasha*. See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. M.E.J. Richardson, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:446, 449. See also "Isaiah," "Jesus," and "Joshua," in *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson.

20. In "Jesus," in *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, it was proposed this was a Hebrew parallelism with "a double entendre or intended a play on words" using *redeemed* and *Jesus* (the Lord is salvation) as parallel terms.