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# THE COVENANT OF CHRIST'S GOSPEL IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Steven L. Olsen

**Abstract:** *With the trained eye of an anthropologist and a historian, Steven Olsen refutes claims that the Book of Mormon is a simple hodge-podge of biblical phrases and responses to controversies that Joseph Smith absorbed from his surroundings. Through a careful discussion of four main claims, he illustrates his thesis that the Book of Mormon “evidences a high degree of focus and coherence, as though its principal writers intentionally crafted the record from a unified and comprehensive perspective.” He shows that the Book of Mormon is not merely a history in the conventional sense, but rather is purposeful in the selection and expression of its core themes.*

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See Steven L. Olsen, “The Covenant of Christ’s Gospel in the Book of Mormon,” in *“To Seek the Law of the Lord”: Essays in Honor of John W. Welch*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson and Daniel C. Peterson (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation, 2017), 209–46. Further information at <https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/to-seek-the-law-of-the-lord-essays-in-honor-of-john-w-welch-2/>.]

**T**his study supports the general thesis that the Book of Mormon text evidences a high degree of focus and coherence, as though its principal writers intentionally crafted the record from a unified and comprehensive perspective. This general thesis has four main claims.

1. Mormon and Moroni model their respective abridgments of the Nephite and Jaredite records after Nephi's Small Plates account.<sup>1</sup>
2. Nephi's vision (1 Ne. 11–14) serves as the spiritual and interpretive centerpiece of his sacred record.<sup>2</sup>
3. Nephi's vision has three dominant themes—Christ's gospel, promised land, and chosen people—which Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni develop as covenants in their respective accounts.<sup>3</sup>
4. Covenants serve the Nephites as the foundation of their (a) special identity as a people, (b) unique historical consciousness, (c) enduring relationship with God, and (d) understanding of and hope for the blessings of eternal life.

Support for these claims comes from a variety of literary patterns in the Book of Mormon text involving diction, poetics, rhetoric, narrative contents, and formal structures, including the following:

1. By far, the four most frequently used nouns in the Book of Mormon are people, God, Lord, and land(s), with 1765, 1675, 1576, and 1353 uses respectively.<sup>4</sup>
2. The text's preoccupation with group identity, territorial consciousness, and historical preservation is grounded in covenant ideology.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Steven L. Olsen, "Prophecy and History: Structuring the Abridgment of the Nephite Records," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 1 (2006): 18–29.

2 Steven L. Olsen, "The Centrality of Nephi's Vision," *Religious Educator* 11, no. 2 (2010): 51–65.

3 Olsen, "Centrality of Nephi's Vision," 56–58; Steven L. Olsen, "The Covenant of the Promised Land: Territorial Symbolism in the Book of Mormon," *FARMS Review* 22, no. 2 (2010): 137–154; Steven L. Olsen, "The Covenant of the Chosen People: The Spiritual Foundations of Ethnic Identity in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scriptures* 21, no. 2 (2012): 14–29.

4 R. Gary Shapiro, comp., *An Exhaustive Concordance of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Hawkes Publication, Inc., 1977), s.v., "people," "God," "Lord," "land," and "lands."

5 Olsen, "Covenant of the Promised Land," pp. 137–154; Steven L. Olsen, "Prospering in the Land of Promise," *FARMS Review* 22, no. 1 (2010): 229–245; Olsen, "Covenant of the Chosen People," 14–29; Steven L. Olsen, "Memory and Identity in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and other Restoration Scriptures* 22, no. 2 (2013): 40–51.

3. Covenants inaugurate Nephi's divinely-ordained ministry (1 Ne. 2:16–24), and their traditional binary structures pervade the official Nephite record.<sup>6</sup>
4. The structure of Mormon's historical abridgment imitates to a great extent the contents, order, and relative weighting of Nephi's prophetic account of the same period of Nephite history.<sup>7</sup>

The present study develops this general thesis with respect to the principal theme of the first 'act' of Nephi's dramatic vision: the mission and gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Ne. 11). It explores the covenant basis of this theme in Nephi's verbatim record and in the abridgments of Mormon and Moroni along three complementary dimensions:

1. The identity and mission of Jesus Christ
2. The nature of Christ's gospel
3. The covenant community centered on Christ's gospel

### **Nephi's Record**

The first event that Nephi details in his Small Plates record is his father's divine calling. In this account (1 Ne. 1:8–20) Lehi sees two divine personages: (1) God "sitting on his throne" and (2) "One descending out of the midst of heaven" whose "luster was above that of the sun at noon-day." The latter is accompanied in his visitation to Lehi by "twelve others" whose "brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament." From these heavenly messengers, Lehi receives a book that warns of the impending destruction of Jerusalem and foretells the "coming of a Messiah and the redemption of the world." The people of Jerusalem try to kill Lehi for delivering these messages; nevertheless, Nephi uses Lehi's vision to preface and focus his own record whose purpose is to "show...that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance." Nephi accomplishes this ambitious objective by expanding and refining (1) the identity of "the Lord," (2) the nature of His "tender mercies," (3) the composition and character of those "whom he hath chosen," and (4) the means and objectives of His "power of deliverance."

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<sup>6</sup> Steven L. Olsen, "An Opposition in All Things: Binary Contrasts in the Book of Mormon," unpublished paper delivered at the Book of Mormon Symposium, Brigham Young University, October 11, 1987.

<sup>7</sup> Olsen, "Prophecy and History," 18–29.

## Identity and Mission of Jesus Christ

In his record, Nephi refers to deity by a number of different names,<sup>8</sup> each of which adds a dimension of understanding to His identity and mission. For example, Nephi uses *Lord* and *God* most frequently and consistently—538 and 382 times, respectively. Customary biblical usage equates *Lord* with Jehovah in the Old Testament and with Christ in the New Testament. The Bible also generally associates *God* with “the supreme Governor of the universe and the Father of mankind.” Although Nephi respects these traditional distinctions, his record also transcends them. For example, he recognizes Christ as *God* (e.g., 2 Ne. 1:10; 26:12), acknowledging his partner role with the Father in the Godhead. The following additional names for deity appear less frequently in Nephi’s record. A common meaning of each follows the frequency of use in parentheses:<sup>9</sup>

- *Lamb* and *Lamb of God* (61 times): a sacrifice for the sins of mankind
- *Christ* (53): the anointed or Messiah
- *Holy One of Israel* (or of *Jacob*) (42): God, with reference to his central attribute—holy
- *Lord of Hosts* (37): commander of the armies of Israel and the angelic armies of heaven
- *Messiah* (29): anointed, king, deliverer
- *Father* (22): creator, all powerful, supreme being
- *Redeemer* (21): one who atones for or sets free another
- *Son of God* and variations (20): Only Begotten of the Father

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8 This paper begs the theological question of whether the formal references to deity in the Book of Mormon are names or titles. Unfortunately, both terms have decidedly modern connotations, which do not easily relate to ancient traditions. In this study, I call these formal identifiers “names” for heuristic purposes, not to position this paper within the ongoing debate.

9 Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v., “God,” “Lord,” “Lamb,” “Christ,” “Holy,” “Hosts,” “Messiah,” “Redeemer,” “Son,” “Jesus,” “Savior.” The following additional names for Christ appear in Nephi’s writings at least once: *Eternal God* or *Father* (1 Ne. 11:21; 12:18; 13:40; 2 Ne. 9:8; 26:12); *Rock* (1 Ne. 13:36; 15:15; 2 Ne. 4:30, 35; 9:45); *Shepherd* (1 Ne. 13:41); *True Vine* (1 Ne. 15:15); *King* (2 Ne. 16:5; 18:21); *Mighty One of Jacob or of Israel* (1 Ne. 21:26; 22:12; 2 Ne. 6:18); *Mediator* (2 Ne. 2:28); *Creator* (2 Ne. 9:5–6); *Immanuel* (2 Ne. 17:14; 18:8); *Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father or God, Prince of Peace* (2 Ne. 19:6; see also 1 Ne. 15:15; 2 Ne. 4:35; 6:17; 20:21); *Beloved and Beloved Son* (2 Ne. 31:11, 15); and *Only Begotten* (2 Ne. 25:12). Definitions of the names for Christ come from “Dictionary,” *The Holy Bible* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979), and Madeleine S. and J. Lane Miller, *The New Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Row, 1952).

in the flesh

- *Jesus* (9): God is help or Savior
- *Savior* (6): deliverer in time of need; preserver

Although the traditional meanings of these names differ from one another, they also complement one another in Nephi's record. The following passages suggest that Nephi generally favors their complementary more than their distinctive meanings.

Yea, even six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem, a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or, in other words, a Savior of the world...Wherefore, all mankind were in a lost and fallen state, and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer. (1 Ne. 10:4, 6)

The Son of God was the Messiah who should come. (1 Ne. 10:17)

Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! (1 Ne. 11:21)

The word of the justice of the Eternal God, and the Messiah who is the Lamb of God, of whom the Holy Ghost beareth record. (1 Ne. 12:18)

And thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. (1 Ne. 20:17)

They shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel. (1 Ne. 22:12)

The Holy One of Israel, the true Messiah, their Redeemer and their God. (2 Ne. 1:10)

The Messiah cometh in six hundred years...his name shall be Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (2 Ne. 25:19)

Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God. (2 Ne. 26:12)

In these and other passages, Nephi identifies Jesus Christ with Messiah, Redeemer, Holy One of Israel, Son of God, Eternal God, Lamb of God, Eternal Father, and Savior, among other names.

Most of Nephi's names for Jesus Christ focus either on His heavenly status (e.g., *God*, *Lord*, *Holy One of Israel*, and *Eternal*

*Father*) or on His divine roles (e.g., *Creator, Messiah, Redeemer, and Savior*). By contrast, two of the most popular types of divine names from the Bible seldom appear in Nephi's record: (1) divine attributes, e.g., *Wonderful, Counselor, Prince of Peace* (2 Ne. 19:6), and *Beloved* (2 Ne. 31:15) and (2) earthly symbols of divine qualities, e.g., *Rock* (1 Ne. 13:36; 15:15; 2 Ne. 4:30, 35; 9:45), *Shepherd* (1 Ne. 13:41; 22:25), *Vine* (1 Ne. 15:15), *Light* (1 Ne. 21:6; 2 Ne. 10:14; 19:2; 20:17), and *Stem* (2 Ne. 21:1).<sup>10</sup> While Nephi's relative emphasis on *Lamb of God* is an exception to this general pattern, Nephi seems primarily concerned with identifying and explicating Christ's identity and mission more than with enumerating His divine qualities and attributes.

It would be incorrect to conclude from these comparisons that Nephi does not recognize the tri-partite Godhead consisting of God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost. Two of the most intimate and profound spiritual experiences from Nephi's sacred record clearly distinguish God the Father from God the Son. The first inaugurates Nephi's sacred account, described above (1 Ne. 1:8–10). The symbolism of this passage implies that *God* refers to Heavenly Father and *One* to Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup> At the end of his record, Nephi relates another encounter with God in which he repeatedly distinguishes the voice of "the Father" from that of "the Son," as they rehearse for him essential steps of the plan of salvation, which is also called the "doctrine of Christ" and which leads to the promise of "eternal life" (2 Ne. 31:11–20). Without a thorough familiarity with the Godhead as three separate and distinct but unified heavenly beings, it would be difficult, if not impossible for Nephi to recognize and distinguish the respective voices of the Father and the Son.

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<sup>10</sup> See Valentina Izmirlieva, *All the Names of the Lord: Lists, Mysticism, Magic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 37–50. Except for *Lamb of God*, Nephi's use of names from these two latter biblical categories depends largely on his citations from Isaiah's prophecies. A partial list of the biblical names of Jesus is found in Alexander Cruden, *Cruden's Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testaments*, ed. A. D. Adams, C. H. Irwin, and S. A. Waters (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1968), Preface. Izmirlieva, *Names of the Lord*, 56–66 includes the English translation of an early Christian list of 187 biblical names for Jesus and discusses the reasons why theologians and clerics have attempted over the centuries to compile exhaustive lists of biblical names for Jesus and the theological impossibility of succeeding in the attempt. See "Dictionary" The Holy Bible, "Christ, Names of" for an effort by the LDS Church to compile a comparable list from the Old and New Testaments.

<sup>11</sup> On the significance of "One" being the first formal reference to Jesus Christ in Nephi's sacred record, see the discussion of this name in Izmirlieva, *Names of the Lord*, 52.

In most instances, however, Nephi's record emphasizes the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, as reflected in Nephi's declared literary purposes in order to show God's "power of deliverance;" "persuade" all mankind "to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob and be saved;" and "persuade our children, and our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God" (1 Ne. 1:20; 6:4; 2 Ne. 25:23).

In order to demonstrate how these purposes are accomplished, Nephi develops his record around the application of the various roles and capabilities of Jesus Christ: performing the atonement, forgiving sin, destroying evil, overcoming death, revealing truth, authorizing saving ordinances, healing disease and misfortune, comforting the distressed, performing miracles, delivering the captive, establishing and fulfilling covenants, judging the righteous and the wicked, nurturing personal virtues, and administering the blessings of eternal life. For the most part, the two generic names *God* and *Lord* collectively refer to this set of divine roles. In certain instances, however, Nephi employs particular names to emphasize specific roles for Christ. The following paragraphs summarize three noteworthy patterns of usage.

Nephi's most striking pattern of the specialized names for Christ concerns the related names, *Lamb* and *Lamb of God*, which Nephi uses most frequently after *Lord* and *God*. Of the 61 uses of these names, all but five are found in Nephi's vision (1 Ne. 11–14). Although other divine names also appear in his vision—*God* (30 times), *Lord* (26), *Son of God* (5), *Christ* (4), *Son of the Eternal Father* (2), *Eternal God* (1), *Messiah* (1), *Savior* (1), and *Shepherd* (1)—*Lamb* and *Lamb of God* are clearly preferred. This name focuses Christ's principal role in the vision: He who suffers the will of the Father in performing the atonement and availing all mankind of the blessings of eternal life.

Another noteworthy pattern of specialized usage involves the related names *Jesus* and *Christ*. In Nephi's record, all nine uses of *Jesus* and 47 of the 53 uses of *Christ* appear in his final testimony (2 Ne. 25–33).<sup>12</sup> The six remaining uses of *Christ* in Nephi's account appear in Jacob's discourse from the temple (2 Ne. 10: 3, 7; 11:4–7). Before his vision, Nephi consistently uses traditional Hebrew names for deity. Following the vision, Nephi increasingly uses names for Christ that reveal the vision's

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12 Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 32, includes Jesus Christ in 1 Ne. 12:18. For ease of exposition in this study, I have used the current LDS edition of the Book of Mormon, which substitutes the name *Messiah*.

enlarged understanding of His divine role and identity. This pattern of usage suggests that Nephi's own spiritual experiences are the principal basis for his expanded understanding of the identity and role of Jesus Christ.

Nephi's final testimony reveals a third distinctive pattern of divine names. Nearly all of the names for Christ that Nephi employs throughout the rest of his account appear as well in his final testimony.<sup>13</sup> In short, Nephi's testimony is the forum for the most sophisticated, complex, and comprehensive use of his corpus of divine names. It is appropriate that Nephi reiterates these names in this context because his final testimony provides an expanded and refined view of the key messages and divine perspectives from the rest of his sacred record. Nephi's final testimony also bears solemn witness of the reality of the Savior, the truthfulness of his gospel or plan of salvation, the eternal nature of God's covenant with Abraham, the general promise of its fulfillment in the last days, and the certainty of its fulfillment in Nephi's life.

Other insightful but less prevalent patterns for the names for deity in Nephi's record include: *Holy One of Israel* is concentrated in key prophetic and doctrinal passages;<sup>14</sup> *Lord of Hosts* appears primarily in the prophecies of Isaiah;<sup>15</sup> *Messiah*, *Son of God*, and *Savior* are reserved exclusively for Nephi's and Lehi's prophecies;<sup>16</sup> and with one exception, *Father* as a name for deity is restricted to Nephi's prophecies.<sup>17</sup>

In short, Nephi develops in his sacred record a concept of deity that is multifaceted and Christ-centered. While grounded in the earlier prophecies of Isaiah and Lehi, Nephi's own understanding of Christ's divine roles and identity is considerably expanded in his unique vision and in the other spiritual experiences of his record. Nephi centers his account of Christ's mortal ministry on the atonement, which enables the unconditional resurrection and the conditional salvation of all mankind. Thus Jesus is *Christ*, *Savior*, *Redeemer*, *Son of God*, and *Only Begotten of the Father*. In addition, Nephi's understanding of Jesus as the God of the Hebrews adds the identities of *Creator*, *Jehovah*, *Messiah*, *Lord of Hosts*, *Holy One of Israel*, and *Eternal God*. In Nephi's theology, Jesus is clearly

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13 The following names for deity appear in 2 Ne. 25–33, with frequency of use in parentheses: *God* (77), *Lord* and *Lord God* (62), *Christ* (47), *Son* and *Son of God* (12), *Jesus* (9), *Messiah* (9), *Lord of Hosts* (9), *Holy One of Israel* (5), *Lamb of God* (3), *Redeemer* (2), *Only Begotten* (1), *Eternal God* (1), and *Savior* (1). See Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*.

14 1 Ne. 19–22, 2 Ne. 1–6, 9, 25–33.

15 1 Ne. 20; 2 Ne. 12–28.

16 1 Ne. 1, 10–15, 21–22; 2 Ne. 1–6, 26–31.

17 1 Ne. 11–14, 22; 2 Ne. 1, 25–33.

subordinate to the Father but partners with Him to create the world and administer the blessings of eternal life through his gospel to all mankind and for all eternity.

Exposition of this complex and comprehensive identity of Jesus Christ is necessary to begin to understand the covenant of Christ's gospel, but it is not sufficient for a complete understanding of this covenant in the Book of Mormon. To this latter end, Nephi's record also illustrates how the theology of Christ is properly expressed in the lives of the Nephites through their worship of and devotion to the Savior. The analysis which follows considers the role of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the lives of Nephi's family and how the gospel creates, distinguishes, and sustains a covenant community.

### **Gospel of Christ**

According to Nephi, a principal objective of his writings is to persuade all mankind "to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God." For Nephi, the "gospel of Jesus Christ" (also called the "doctrine of Christ") consists of the "knowledge of Jesus Christ" and is the plan and power whereby all mankind may come unto God and receive the blessing of eternal life.<sup>18</sup> In Nephi's writings, *doctrine* and *gospel* are singular, collective nouns, connoting a unified, integrated, and comprehensive perspective that is focused on achieving a common spiritual purpose: eternal life with God in His heavenly kingdom. With only one exception (2 Ne. 28:12), all uses of *doctrine* (singular) in Nephi's writings and throughout the rest of the Book of Mormon are gospel-oriented and Christ-centered. By contrast, all uses of *doctrines* (plural) throughout Nephi's writings and the rest of the Book of Mormon are associated with "false," "foolish," "evil," and devilish beliefs.<sup>19</sup>

In Nephi's writings, the covenant of Christ's gospel, stated simply and unequivocally, is, "the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world; and...all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved" (1 Ne. 13:40). Reinforcing and amplifying this central message are the following declarations from Nephi's record:

[The House of Israel] shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved. (1 Ne. 15:14)

18 1 Ne. 10:11–14; 13:34–37; 15:13–14; 2 Ne. 30:5–17; 31:1–21.

19 Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v., "doctrine," "doctrines," and "gospel."

I say unto you, that as these things are true, and as the Lord God liveth, 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 Ne. 25:20)

I know by this that unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved. (2 Ne. 31:16)

And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen. (2 Ne. 31:21)

*Salvation, deliverance, and redemption* as well as their respective variations are the words by which Nephi most frequently refers to the process of obtaining this ultimate spiritual objective.<sup>20</sup> Nephi's preferred word for this concept is *deliverance* (and its variations) which he introduces into his record in the initial statement of his literary intent: "I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance" (1 Ne. 1:20). While Nephi uses the term to refer to temporal deliverance as well, its primary connotation in his record is spiritual, as reflected in the following excerpt from Jacob's masterful discourse on Christ's atonement.

And because of the way of deliverance of our God, the Holy One of Israel, this death, of which I have spoken, which is the temporal, shall deliver up its dead; which death is the grave.

And this death of which I have spoken, which is the spiritual death, shall deliver up its dead; which spiritual death is hell; wherefore, death and hell must deliver up their dead, and hell must deliver up its captive spirits, and the grave must deliver up its captive bodies, and the bodies and the spirits of men

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20 Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v., "save," "saved," "salvation," "deliver," "delivered," "deliverance," "redeem," "redeemed," "redemption." Interestingly, the word *save* in the Book of Mormon is used exclusively as a synonym of "except" or "only," as in "save he shall prepare a way" (1 Ne. 3:7).

will be restored one to the other; and it is by the power of the resurrection of the Holy One of Israel.

O how great the plan of our God! For on the other hand, the paradise of God must deliver up the spirits of the righteous, and the grave deliver up the body of the righteous; and the spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are living souls, having a perfect knowledge like unto us in the flesh, save it be that our knowledge shall be perfect. (2 Ne. 9:11–13)

Of all the synonyms of salvation, *redeem*, *redeemed*, and *redemption* appear least frequently in Nephi's record. Nevertheless, they appear in the most poignant and personal declarations of this truth. At the end of his life, for example, Father Lehi witnesses to his descendants, "the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love" (2 Ne. 1:15). On the same occasion, Lehi declares to his son Jacob, "I know that thou art redeemed, because of the righteousness of thy Redeemer; for thou hast beheld that in the fullness of time he cometh to bring salvation unto men" (2 Ne. 2:3). Nephi ends his own record with the solemn declaration, "I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell" (2 Ne. 33:6).

Of the several antonyms of salvation in Nephi's record, including *death*, *damnation*, and *condemnation* with their respective variants, *death* is his preferred term.<sup>21</sup> As with *deliverance*, *death* has a temporal application, but its prime focus is spiritual. In fact, its pattern of usage suggests that temporal death is primarily an empirical analog to the greater Nephite concern with spiritual death. In Nephi's record, physical death—the separation of the body and spirit—is a universal requirement of the plan of salvation and is overcome for all mankind by the resurrection. On the other hand, spiritual death—separation of mankind from God—is caused by sin and is overcome through the atonement of Christ.

The centerpiece of the plan of salvation in Nephi's record is the atonement of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the following examples.

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21 Death and its variations—*die*, *died*, *dies*, and *dieth*—appear 48 times in Nephi's record, by far the greatest concentration of which is in Jacob's masterful discourse on Christ's atonement and the plan of salvation (see 2 Ne. 9). By contrast, Nephi uses variations of *condemn* only four times and of *damn* only once, see Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v., "condemn," "condemnation," "damned," "death," "die," "died," "dies," and "dieth."

- The “redemption of the world” by Messiah is a central message of Lehi’s initial vision and of Lehi’s prophecies which serve as a prelude to Nephi’s account of his own ministry (1 Ne. 1:19; 10:1–11).
- The prime objective of Lehi’s dream of the tree of life is to have mankind partake of its fruit which is a symbol of eternal life, the “greatest of all the gifts of God” (1 Ne. 8:12–16; 15:36).
- The mission of the “great Mediator” is the fulcrum of the redemptive history of mankind as related in Nephi’s summary of his father’s patriarchal blessing to Jacob (2 Ne. 2).
- The “way of deliverance” through the resurrection and redemption of “the Holy One of Israel” is the focus of Nephi’s summary of Jacob’s masterful discourse (2 Ne. 9).
- The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the redemption of mankind through His atonement inaugurate and conclude Nephi’s vision and his final testimony.<sup>22</sup>

In the record of his own ministry, Nephi devotes considerable attention to the process by which God’s children can avail themselves of the blessings of salvation. The most basic requirement is keeping God’s commandments. Of all the verbs that Nephi uses to refer to this requirement of salvation—including *follow*, *obey*, and *observe*—*keep* is Nephi’s preferred term, as reflected in its frequency and contexts of use.<sup>23</sup> While all four verbs denote faithful adherence to God, *keep* expands and enriches the basic concept with such additional connotations as ‘guard,’ ‘protect,’ ‘preserve,’ ‘internalize,’ ‘create,’ ‘hold sacred,’ ‘make

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22 1 Ne. 11, 14; 2 Ne. 25:7–26; 31–33. Olsen, “Centrality of Nephi’s Vision,” 52–55 suggests that Lehi’s dream and Nephi’s vision serve Nephi’s record respectively as figurative and literal representations of the plan of salvation.

23 Nephi uses *keep* and its variations fifty times in his record, almost exclusively with reference to *keeping* God’s commandments and more than twice as many as all other related verbs combined. For example, *observe* and its variants appear only three times in Nephi’s record, all with reference to God’s commandments. *Obey* and its variations appear nine times in Nephi’s record, nearly all with reference to God’s commandments. While *follow* and its variations appear nineteen times in Nephi’s record, less than half of these uses are in connection with God’s commandments or righteousness. See Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v., “follow,” “followed,” “followers,” “following,” “keep,” “keeper,” “keepeth,” “keeping,” “kept,” “obedient,” “obey,” “obeyeth,” “observe,” “observed,” “observing.”

holy,' 'sustain,' and 'steward.'<sup>24</sup> Thus the phrase *keep the commandments* implies a profound, complex, and intimate relationship to the doctrine of Christ that engages one's whole soul during mortality and throughout eternity. In addition, Nephi regularly uses the adjective *obedient* to describe the character of those who are especially valiant in keeping God's commandments.<sup>25</sup>

Nephi teaches his followers to *keep* two different but complementary commandments — the Law of Moses and the doctrine of Christ. The Law of Moses is the established religion in the Holy Land and the foundation of religious observances of Lehi's family at the beginning of Nephi's narrative. It consists of a series of practices that are intended to focus all aspects of one's mortal life on God. However, God reveals through Lehi and Nephi that the Law of Moses will be fulfilled during the earthly ministry of the Savior. In its place, Christ will institute the gospel (or "doctrine") of Christ, a higher law designed to prepare mankind for eternal life in the presence of God.

Foundational principles and practices of the gospel of Christ include faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance for one's sins, baptism by water for the remission of sins, baptism by fire (the Holy Ghost) to purify and renew one's soul, and endurance in righteousness to the end of one's life (2 Ne. 31). Prayer and obedience are important components of this spiritual progression, but achieving one's eternal potential also requires a life of devotion, dedication, wisdom, courage, service, and perseverance in view of nurturing such godly qualities as charity, patience, holiness, humility, forgiveness, and spirituality. Besides keeping the commandments, in the sense described above, Nephi emphasizes the need to cultivate spiritual gifts and experiences, such as revelation and prophecy, in order to realize one's eternal potential and to bless others to come unto and be reconciled to God.

Nephi's own spiritual preparations require also that he be willing to risk his mortal life, pursue new and seemingly impossible objectives, develop godly capabilities and talents, completely and willingly submit to the will of God, learn troubling truths about the future, suffer verbal and physical abuse, endure physical captivity, and rebuke and then forgive those who do him harm. At the end of his earthly ministry, Nephi presents himself as an exemplar of the doctrine of Christ, having received the promise of eternal life and being one whose writings constitute "the

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24 See 1 Ne. 5:16; 6:1; 13:32–43; 16:14; 19:3–5; 2 Ne. 9:41.

25 1 Ne. 2:3; 22:30–31; 2 Ne. 5:31; 31:7.

words of Christ,” which will stand as a bright testimony to all mankind at the judgment “bar” of Christ at the “last day” (2 Ne. 31–33).

In short, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the means whereby all mankind can come to know their eternal identities as sons and daughters of God and become like God in preparation for returning to and enjoying His presence for eternity. The covenant of Christ’s gospel is the divine promise and principal mechanism of the fulfillment of this plan and the foundation of an eternal relationship with God.

### **Covenant Community**

In Nephi’s record, the nature and composition of the covenant community that is created, united, and distinguished by the gospel of Jesus Christ is called most frequently “church of the Lamb of God” and “kingdom of God.”<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, there is no evidence that Lehi’s family formally organized a church — at least as the term is understood today, namely an ecclesiastical organization with congregations, rituals, worship services, authorities, and established beliefs — even though Nephi appoints his brothers as “priests and teachers” (2 Ne. 5:26) and even though Nephi supposes that Laban had been with the “elders of the Jews” and “brethren of the church” (1 Ne. 4:22–27) on the night of his fateful death.

In Nephi’s life, the covenant community which his family actually experiences is more likely either a patriarchy (under Lehi’s direction) or a kingship (under Nephi’s direction). On his part, Lehi directs his extended family as prophet and patriarch by leading them safely away from Jerusalem and through the wilderness to the promised land; testifying repeatedly of eternal truths and exhorting them to righteousness; receiving dreams, visions, and revelations and prophecies on their behalf; performing sacrifices and rituals according to the Law of Moses; pondering the scriptures and other spiritual matters regularly and deeply; keeping a sacred record of his ministry; and bestowing patriarchal blessings on his posterity.

In his own capacity as prophet and king, Nephi faithfully carries out Lehi’s inspired directions; establishes his followers according to divine covenants and revelations; “likens” ancient prophecies and other scriptures to their contemporary lives and challenges; receives divine direction and instructs his followers and adversaries accordingly; and keeps sacred records in accordance with God’s will for the salvation of his family and of all mankind.

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26 1 Ne. 13:37; 14:10–14; 15:33–35.

Although the church of God *per se* is not central to the sociology of Nephi's record, it is core to its theology. The term *church* is not used in Nephi's vision of the earthly mission of Christ; however, Christ's baptism is the first act that Nephi details of the Savior's earthly ministry, and His followers are "healed by the power of the Lamb of God" (priesthood) and are led by twelve "apostles of the Lamb" after His crucifixion (1 Ne. 11:31, 34–36). In his vision, Nephi uses *church* to provide a systematic and categorical contrast between two ideal-type covenant communities—that united by their worship of the Savior ("church of the Lamb of God") and that committed to the works of evil ("church of the devil," also called "great and abominable church," "mother of abominations," and "whore of all the earth"), as represented the following table (see 1 Ne. 13–14). In a later passage, Nephi identifies the "true church and fold of God" as part of the ancient covenant that the Lord will restore in the latter days (2 Ne. 9:1–2).

In Nephi's final testimony, essential elements of *church* as the covenant community figure prominently. He identifies Christ's followers as the "people of his church," distinguished as those who "believe in Christ, and worship the Father in his name, with pure hearts and clean hands" (2 Ne. 25:14–16). Nephi also reiterates the contrast from his vision between members of the church of the devil and those of the church of the Lamb (2 Ne. 26:20–32; 28:9–14):

- Church of the devil: "pride," "stumbled," "put down the power and miracles of God," "own wisdom," "own learning," "get gain," "grind upon the face of the poor," "envyings," "strifes," "malice," "secret combinations," "devil...is the founder," "murder," "works of darkness," "priestcrafts," "lie," "steal," "take the name of the Lord their God in vain," "contend," "whoredoms," "false and vain and foolish doctrines," "puffed up," "hide their counsels from the Lord," "corrupted," "pride," "false teachers," "rob the poor," "persecute the meek"
- Church of the Lamb of God: "charity," "love," "labor in Zion," "humble followers of Christ"

In addition, Nephi's final testimony also elaborates the "doctrine of Christ," beginning with a statement of the necessity for Christ, though sinless, to receive and embrace the covenant of baptism: "To fulfil all righteousness," Christ "humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him

in keeping his commandments” (2 Ne. 31:4–7).<sup>27</sup> By extension, Nephi testifies that all mankind need baptism in order to receive the blessings of life eternal (vv. 17–20). While it is not until well into Mormon’s abridgment that baptism is actually administered among the Nephites as a priesthood ordinance of membership in the church of Christ, its introduction in Nephi’s record as an essential ordinance of salvation is prelude to a complete understanding of the church as a central institution of the covenant community that is created, bound, distinguished, and preserved by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **Mormon’s Abridgment**

The covenant of Christ’s gospel is a central theme of Mormon’s abridgment, and Mormon adopts Nephi’s framework of the covenant in order to craft his account of Nephite civilization. For example, Mormon has Nephite holy men frequently repeat the covenant in terms identical to Nephi’s record, as illustrated by the following passages.

And moreover, I say unto you, 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. (Mosiah 3:17; see also 4:8; 5:8)

Remember that only in and through Christ ye can be saved. (Mosiah 16:13)

There can no man be saved except his garments are...cleansed from all stain, through the blood of [Christ] of whom it has been spoken by our fathers, who should come to redeem his people from their sins. (Alma 5:21)

And [Christ] shall come into the world to redeem his people; and he shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name; and these are they that shall have eternal life, and salvation cometh to none else. (Alma 11:40)

There is no other way or means whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ. Behold, he is the light and life of

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<sup>27</sup> Noel B. Reynolds, “Understanding Christian Baptism through the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 51, no. 2 (2012): 5–37, is one of many academic studies of the ordinance of baptism in the Book of Mormon.

the world. Behold, he is the word of truth and righteousness.  
(Alma 38:9; see also Hel. 5:9)

In developing the identity and mission of Jesus Christ, Mormon follows Nephi's preference for *God* and *Lord*, using these names 1053 and 729 times respectively. For the other divine names that appear in his abridgment, Mormon draws on virtually the same corpus as Nephi,<sup>28</sup> even though he does not precisely imitate Nephi's patterns of usage. Because Mormon declares that a primary focus of his abridgment concerns Nephi's prophecies of the coming of Christ (Words of Mormon 1:4–5), he privileges the more specialized names of *Christ* (197 uses), *Jesus* (141), and *Son (of God)* (75). By contrast, between Mosiah 1 and Mormon 8, Mormon employs Nephi's two dozen other names for Christ less than a total of one hundred times. Following Nephi, Mormon uses these other names for Christ in specialized applications, as seen in the following examples.

- *Redeemer* (18 uses) occurs mostly in testimonials, exhortations and commentaries<sup>29</sup>
- *Lord of Hosts* (14) occurs exclusively in prophetic contexts<sup>30</sup>
- *Lord Omnipotent* (6) occurs exclusively in King Benjamin's valedictory sermon<sup>31</sup>
- *Only Begotten* (6) occurs exclusively in Alma's teachings<sup>32</sup>
- *Creator* (5) occurs exclusively in prophetic exhortations<sup>33</sup>
- *Savior* (4) appears nearly always in Mormon's editorial asides<sup>34</sup>
- *Lamb (of God)* (4) appears only in sermons<sup>35</sup>
- *Messiah* (2) appears only in prophecies of warning to wicked Nephites<sup>36</sup>

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28 Mormon slightly extends Nephi's list of divine names with *Lord Omnipotent*, which appears only in King Benjamin's valedictory address (Mosiah 3: 5, 17–18, 21; 5:2, 15) and *Alpha and Omega*, by which Christ references himself immediately preceding his post-resurrection ministry (3 Ne. 9:18).

29 Mosiah 18:30; 26:26; 27:30, 36; Alma 7:7; 19:13; 28:8; 37:9; 61:13; Hel. 5:11–12; 15:13; 3 Ne. 5:26; 10:10; 16:4; 22:5, 8.

30 Hel. 13:17–18, 32; 3 Ne. 22–25.

31 Mosiah 3, 5.

32 Alma 5–13.

33 Mosiah 3:8; 29:19; Alma 5:25; 30:44; Hel. 14:12.

34 3 Ne. 5:20; Morm. 3:14; 7:10; Moro. 8:29.

35 Mosiah 14:7; Alma 7:14; 13:11; 34:36.

36 Mosiah 13:33; Hel. 8:13.

Mormon is faithful to his declared purpose of emphasizing the prophecies of the coming of Christ and the teaching of His doctrine, especially that of the atonement. For example, of the hundreds of prophecies included in Mormon's abridgment, the single largest number foretells the earthly ministry of Christ. Virtually every Nephite holy man from Benjamin to Mormon anticipates Christ's mortal ministry, particularly his redemptive role. The following are selections from this prophetic corpus.

The time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent...shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay...for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and abominations of his people. (Mosiah 3:5-7)

God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people. (Mosiah 15:1)

He shall be born of Mary...by the power of the Holy Ghost... And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities...that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities. (Alma 7:10-13)

The Son of God shall come in his glory; and his glory shall be the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father...to redeem those who shall be baptized unto repentance through faith on his name. (Alma 9:26-27)

Christ shall come among the children of men, to take upon him the transgressions of his people, and that he shall atone for the sins of the world. (Alma 34:8)

Five years more cometh, and behold, then cometh the Son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name. (Hel. 14:2)

The following excerpts illustrate that Mormon also follows Nephi in emphasizing the complementarity of the various divine names and roles of Christ.

He shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning. (Mosiah 3:8)

Redemption cometh through Christ the Lord, who is the very Eternal Father. (Mosiah 16:15)

They brought them to the knowledge of the Lord their God and to rejoice in Jesus Christ their Redeemer. (Alma 37:9)

That ye might know of the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning. (Hel. 14:12)

I have reason to bless my God and my Savior Jesus Christ... They shall know their Redeemer, who is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (3 Ne. 5:20, 26)

Mormon's focus on Christ's identity and mission is drawn even sharper in his use of the name *Father*. While Mormon refers to Christ by this name less than two dozen times in his entire abridgment, he has Christ refer to "my Father" and "the Father" nearly two hundred times in the account of His Nephite ministry alone.<sup>37</sup> While Christ uses other names, including *God*, to refer to Heavenly Father during this ministry, these instances are infrequent compared to that of *Father*. This dominant pattern leads to several conclusions about Christ's mission within Mormon's abridgment.

1. Mormon crafts his abridgment in large measure to emphasize Christ's special relationship with His Father and the "infinite and eternal" benefits that come to mankind thereby.
2. During His mission to the Nephites, Christ, as the Son of God, consistently positions himself as subordinate to, focused on, and aligned with His Father.
3. Christ's gospel is intended to qualify mankind to return to the Father's presence in order to enjoy eternal glory.

For Mormon, every other purpose and value of Christ's gospel pales by comparison.

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<sup>37</sup> Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v., "Father."

Nephi's grand perspective on the covenant of Christ's gospel is woven throughout and becomes integral to much of Mormon's historical narrative. I cite four general examples.

1. Conversion to or rejection of the gospel of Jesus Christ is a primary focus of the lives of particular individuals and groups in Mormon's abridgment:<sup>38</sup>
  - Individuals: King Benjamin (Omni 1:25; Mosiah 2–6), King Noah (Mosiah 11), Alma the elder (Mosiah 17–18), Alma the younger (Mosiah 27; Alma 29, 36), the sons of Mosiah (Mosiah 27; Alma 26), Nehor (Alma 1), Amulek (Alma 8, 10), Zeezrom (Alma 10–15), King Lamoni (Alma 17–20), Lamoni's father (Alma 22), and Korihor (Alma 30)
  - Groups: followers of Benjamin (Mosiah 4–6), Alma (Mosiah 18), Amlici (Alma 2–3), and Amulon (Alma 21–25); residents of Zarahemla (Alma 4–6; Hel. 13–16), Gideon and Melek (Alma 6–8), Ammonihah (Alma 8–14), Sidom (Alma 15), and Bountiful and of the "lands round about" (3 Ne. 11; 4 Ne. 1); and the people of Ammon (Alma 17–24, 27) and the Zoramites (Alma 31–35)
2. Mormon develops Nephi's doctrine of baptism, the ritual foundation of the covenant of Christ's gospel, around four general purposes:
  - Sign of repentance for the remission of sins<sup>39</sup>
  - Prelude to receiving the Holy Ghost<sup>40</sup>

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38 Literary scholars generally recognize that biblical writers developed their characters primarily to serve the text's central ideological purposes not to illustrate unique individuals with distinctive personalities, backgrounds, interests, appearances, and motivations (Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953], 1–18; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* [New York: Basic Books, 1981], 114–130; Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985], 321–364). Coming from a biblical culture and literary tradition, the Book of Mormon may well evidence this and other biblical literary conventions.

39 e.g., Mosiah 26:22; Alma 5:62; 6:2; 7:14; 8:10; 48:19; 62:45; Hel. 3:24; 5:17–19; 3 Ne. 1:23; 7:24–26; 11:23, 37–38; 23:5; 27:16–20; 30:2.

40 e.g., Mosiah 18:10; 3 Ne. 12:1–2; 18:5–7; 19:9–13; 26:17; 27:20; 28:18; 30:2.

- Foundation of a covenant community based on the gospel of Jesus Christ<sup>41</sup>
  - Priesthood ordinance essential for salvation in the Kingdom of God<sup>42</sup>
3. Mormon defines the gospel (or doctrine) of Jesus Christ primarily in salvific terms:
- The plan of salvation is established “from the foundations of the world”<sup>43</sup>
  - Mortality is a “probationary state,” a time to “prepare to meet God”<sup>44</sup>
  - The atonement of Jesus Christ is the means whereby mankind can be purified, on condition of repentance, righteousness, and endurance to the end<sup>45</sup>
  - Following Nephi, *deliverance* and *death* are Mormon’s preferred terms for the contrasting consequences of the plan of salvation<sup>46</sup>
  - “Between death and the resurrection,” the spirits of all mankind experience a period of happiness or misery, based on the spiritual quality of their mortal lives, in preparation for the judgment (Alma 40)
  - Jesus Christ is Judge of all mankind, and His righteous judgment “according to their works” determines their state in eternity<sup>47</sup>
  - In eternity, the souls of all mankind receive salvation or damnation, enjoy eternal life or suffer endless death, experience joy or sorrow, and live in heaven or hell<sup>48</sup>

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41 e.g., Mosiah 18:8–10; 21:30–35; 25:18; 26:15–22, 37; Alma 4:4–5; 5:3; 15:12–14; 19:35; 62:45–46; Hel. 3:26; 3 Ne. 18:5, 16; 21:6; 26:21; 30:2; Morm. 7:10.

42 e.g., Mosiah 18:13; 3 Ne. 11:33–38; 23:5; Morm. 7:10.

43 e.g., Mosiah 4:6–7; 15:19; 18:13; Alma 12:25, 30; 13:3–7; 18:39; 22:13; 42:26; Hel. 5:47; 3 Ne. 1:14; 26:5.

44 e.g., Alma 5:28–31; 12:24–37; 34:31–34; 42:4–13; Hel. 13:38.

45 e.g., Mosiah 3:11–19; 4:2–8; 13:28–32; 15:1–20; 16:4–15; 18:13; Alma 5:15, 48; 7:11–13; 12:25–33; 13:5; 21:9; 24:13; 33:22; 34:9–31; 42:11–23; Hel. 5:9–11; 14:2; 3 Ne. 9:17–21; 27:13–15; Morm. 7:7.

46 From Mosiah 1 to Mormon 8, *deliver* and its variations appear 160 times and *death* and its variations appear 219 times, see Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v., “death,” “deliver,” “deliverance,” “delivered,” “delivering,” “die,” “died,” and “dieth.”

47 e.g., Mosiah 3:10–27; 16:9–10; 27:31; Alma 5:22; 11:41–45; 12:8–15; 33:22; 36:15; 40:21–23; 41:1–3; 42:16–24; 3 Ne.i 26:4–5; 27:15–17; Morm. 3:18–22; 6:21.

48 e.g., Mosiah 2:41; 3:18–25; 5:15, 50–51; 15:7–28; 18:9–13; Alma 3:26; 5:6–10; 9:28; 12:16–20; 26:13–15; 40:24–26; 41:5–10; 42:15–16; Hel. 3:28–30; 5:8; 12:26; 14:15–19; 3 Ne. 9:14.

4. In Mormon's abridgment, the specific promise of eternal life is personally extended to:
- Alma, the elder: "Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee that thou shalt have eternal life" (Mosiah 26:20)
  - Sons of Mosiah: "they shall have eternal life" (Mosiah 28:7; Alma 26:20)
  - Alma, the younger: "I know that he will raise me up at the last day, to dwell with him in glory" (Alma 36:28)
  - Christ's twelve disciples: "ye shall come unto me in my kingdom; and with me ye shall find rest....ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father; yea, your joy shall be full" (3 Ne. 28:1–10)
  - Mormon: "I know that I shall be lifted up at the last day" (Morm. 2:19)<sup>49</sup>

This small selection of passages suggests that virtually all of the sermons, counsel, exhortations, and commentary as well as most of the details concerning particular individuals, groups, and events from Mormon's abridgment follow, refine, and expand Nephi's concept of the covenant of Christ's gospel. In what follows, I summarize four successive periods of Nephite history from Mormon's abridgment, each of which further develops a key component of the covenant of Christ's gospel.

### **Uniting and distinguishing the covenant community (Mosiah 1–24)**

Much of the Book of Mosiah is an extended case study of the contrasting reigns of two Nephite kings—Benjamin who fully embraces the gospel of Jesus Christ and Noah who rejects and perverts it.

At the end of his exemplary life, King Benjamin gathers his people together in order to identify his chosen successor and to give them a name that will distinguish them from all other peoples (Mosiah 1:10–12). His ability to do so is a monumental accomplishment given the fact that he and his father Mosiah I had to restore peace among a people who were riven by warfare and wickedness. They also united with another people (in Zarahemla) whom the righteous survivors of these Nephite contentions discovered as they sought a new homeland apart from

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<sup>49</sup> "Lifted up" in the Book of Mormon is equivalent to the term "exalt" and its variations in the Doctrine and Covenants (see D&C 121:8; 132:17–63). Its negative connotations are usually connected with pride, ambition, and ostentation, while its positive connotations are equivalent to eternal life. See relevant references in Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v., "lifted."

their wicked compatriots.<sup>50</sup> Through Christ-like leadership, constant vigilance, and pervasive righteousness, Mosiah I and Benjamin succeed in this worthy but ambitious endeavor. Benjamin's valedictory address at the end of his life reminds his followers how they had achieved this idyllic state and why preserving it matters to them and their descendants. Major themes of his address include (1) humility, or recognizing God as the Supreme Being, and regarding one another (including the king) as "unprofitable servants" of God are essential components of righteousness (Mosiah 2:9–30); (2) devotion, or worshiping Christ as the Son of God and Savior of the World, and keeping His commandments are required to receive the gospel blessings of peace in this life and eternal life in the next (Mosiah 2:31–4:10; 5:1–15); and (3) service, or blessing others through gospel service, is the highest expression of personal righteousness and the foundation of a holy community (Mosiah 4:11–30).<sup>51</sup>

As a result of Benjamin's discourse, his followers unite in making a covenant to live the gospel for the rest of their lives. Thus, the king bestows on them the name, "children of Christ," with the justification, "for behold, this day hath he spiritually begotten you."<sup>52</sup> Benjamin's people accept this covenant identity and live accordingly until the rising generation, who had neither known the king nor heard and understood his teachings, comes of age (Mosiah 26).

Before describing the rebellion of the rising generation at Zarahemla, Mormon shifts the focus of his narrative to an account of a group of Nephites who follow the "over-zealous" Zeniff to reclaim the Nephites' former homeland. Zeniff's son, Noah, succeeds him to the leadership of this group. Mormon's account of King Noah's reign provides a systematic and categorical contrast to that of King Benjamin. Elitism, self-indulgence, ostentation, pride, wickedness, lasciviousness, and other evils foment civil unrest and eventually destroy the security and safety of Noah's kingdom. Noah and his wicked priests go so far as to put to death the prophet Abinadi, who tries unsuccessfully to save them from destruction (Mosiah 9–17). Abinadi is the first Nephite prophet

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50 Omni 1:12–19; Words of Mormon 1:12–18; Mosiah 1:1.

51 See Neal A. Maxwell, "King Benjamin's Sermon: A Manual for Discipleship," in *King Benjamin's Speech: 'That Ye May Learn Wisdom'*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 1–22, and Bruce A. Van Orden, "The Use of King Benjamin's Address by Latter-day Saints," in *King Benjamin's Speech*, 411–477 for more extensive summaries of the main doctrinal points of this sermon.

52 Mosiah 5:7. Verse 9 strengthens this identity, promising in a future time that "whosoever doeth this shall be found at the right hand of God, for he shall know the name by which he is called; for he shall be called by the name of Christ."

who is killed by his own people. Before Noah's kingdom collapses, many individuals are killed, and the survivors are placed into bondage (Mosiah 19–20). In the meantime, one of Noah's priests, named Alma, is converted by Abinadi's teaching, repents of his sins, receives from God the authority to baptize, and secretly begins to establish a covenant community among the converted people of Zeniff.<sup>53</sup> Eventually, the righteous survivors of these moral and civil disasters escape their captors and return to Zarahemla where they reunite with those ruled by King Mosiah II, Benjamin's son and worthy successor (Mosiah 21–24).

### **Establishing the Church of Christ among the covenant people (Mosiah 25 – 3 Nephi 10)**

The catastrophe of Noah's wicked reign and the miraculous conversion of Mosiah's sons to the gospel of Jesus Christ prompt King Mosiah II to disband the long-standing practice of kingship among the Nephites and institute in its place a government of law known as the "reign of the judges" (Mosiah 26–29). A major implication of this formal shift in governance is that Nephite society now becomes segmented into functional institutions, each having a measure of independence and delegated civil authority. Mormon's abridgment recognizes three key civic institutions: government, military, and religion. For the first time among the Nephites, the religious function is concentrated in the formal organization of a church. This is not to say that earlier generations of Nephites had neither officials (priests and teachers), places of worship (temples and synagogues), nor moral and ritual systems (Law of Moses and gospel of Christ). It does recognize, however, that as far as the Book of Mormon narrative is concerned, this is the first instance of the formal organization among the Nephites of an ecclesiastical organization that operates as a separate social institution with distinct beliefs, regulations, and practices and identifiable congregations comprised of individuals that are not necessarily biologically related to one another.<sup>54</sup>

The laws of Mosiah that allow for a church of Christ among the Nephites also allow for other, competing religions, which complicate the periodic efforts to "regulate"<sup>55</sup> the congregations or "churches" of

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<sup>53</sup> Mosiah 18. This may be the first instance in the Book of Mormon of a covenant community functioning beyond an extended family network.

<sup>54</sup> Righteous descent, one of the hallmarks of leadership of the Nephite covenant community from Lehi to Mosiah II, continues to regulate succession to leadership in the church, from the time of Alma to the coming of Christ, when the twelve disciples assume the responsibility of ecclesiastical leadership.

<sup>55</sup> Mosiah 26:37; Alma 6:7; 45:21–22; 62:44.

Christ<sup>56</sup> by its “priests and teachers” and “elders.”<sup>57</sup> Dissention from within the church and persecution from without motivate Alma (the son of Alma who was converted by Abinadi), who was initially appointed both chief judge and chief priest among the Nephites, to resign his political appointment in order to focus exclusively on his ecclesiastical duties (Alma 4).

The organization, operation, teachings, values, and practices of the church of Christ are a prime focus of Mormon's abridgment of the first half of the Book of Alma. Alma's role as chief priest is principally pastoral in nature. His efforts to regulate individual congregations concentrate on teaching correct principles, enforcing moral standards, appointing priesthood officers, and authorizing priesthood ordinances such as baptism. Mormon's narrative of this period tracks two crucial processes: Alma's ministry among the Nephite churches describes how local officers and individual members are expected to behave towards one another and towards those not of the faith, including Nephites who oppose the church of Christ (Alma 4–16), and the ministries of the sons of King Mosiah II and their companions establish the church of Christ and its gospel among the Lamanites (Alma 17–26).

Both ministries are lengthy and risky but also remarkably successful. Many repent of their sins, convert to the gospel, accept baptism, change their lives, and build up churches of Christ. Success of their efforts, however, is neither universal nor unequivocal: many Nephites and Lamanites reject or oppose the missionaries' teachings, embrace competing moral orders, undermine the spiritual stability of the social order, and seek to persecute or kill converts to Christ's gospel and establish alliances with the enemies of godliness.

*Priestcraft* is a term by which Mormon labels false churches and their philosophies, defined thus: “there were many who loved the vain things of the world, and they went forth preaching false doctrines; and this they did for the sake of riches and honor” (Alma 1:16). Mormon applies an even more insidious label to groups that intentionally embrace the doctrines, practices, oaths, covenants, and objectives of Satan. Rather than being simply worldly, as priestcrafts generally are, *secret combinations* establish themselves in conscious league with the devil in order to accomplish his evil bidding. While Mormon uses *secret combination* to refer to a variety of unnamed Satan-focused organizations, the “robbers of Gadianton”

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56 Mosiah 25; Alma 23; 45.

57 Mosiah 27:5; Alma 4:7, 16; 6:1; 15:13; 23:4.

personify secret combinations, which Mormon credits with the eventual annihilation of the people and church of Christ.<sup>58</sup>

The lack of faithfulness of church members to their covenants allows priestcrafts and secret combinations to undermine the moral and social stability of Nephite society. Thus the church's role in Mormon's narrative progressively diminishes in favor of the military and the ministries of individual prophets. Terrible wickedness becomes nearly universal among both Nephites and Lamanites, and civil unrest, warfare, and their related destructions become rampant. This segment of Mormon's abridgment ends with widespread natural and social disasters that destroy cities, landforms, populations, and social institutions in order to preserve a measure of the sacred covenants around which the society could be rebuilt (3 Ne. 9–10).

### **Christ ministering the gospel among the Nephites (3 Nephi 11–4 Nephi 1:19)**

The personal ministry of the resurrected Christ reestablishes among the Nephites the covenants of salvation, including that of Christ's gospel. Details of this covenant renewal are described below.

Immediately upon appearing to the survivors of the terrible catastrophes, Christ identifies himself as: "Jesus Christ whom the prophets testified shall come into the world;" "Light and the life of the world;" One who "glorified the Father in taking upon [him] the sins of the world," "suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning;" and was "slain for the sins of the world;" "God of Israel;" "God of the whole earth" (3 Ne. 11:9–17).

After the Nephites acknowledge his divine identity, Christ bestows the power to baptize on selected disciples and teaches them the proper manner to extend to others this formal sign of the gospel covenant (3 Ne. 11:18–29). Christ then teaches his disciples how to act consistent with his gospel. Exposition of His doctrine begins with a reiteration of His

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58 Hel. 2:12–14; 6:18–37; 11:26; 3 Ne. 1:27–29; 2:11–18. Secret combinations play an insidious role throughout the Book of Mormon, beginning with Nephi's record (2 Ne. 9:9; 26:22) and ending with Moroni's prophecies of the last days and his abridgment of the Jaredite record (Morm. 8:27; Ether 8:19–23; 14:8–10), see also Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v., "combination(s)" and "secret." Secret combinations are consistently associated with "powers [and "works"] of darkness." The two extended expositions of secret combinations in the Book of Mormon specifically mention the formal "oaths," "signs," "words," "covenants," "plans," and "works" that put them in conscious league with the devil and make them his active agents of death and destruction (see especially Alma 37 and Hel. 6).

divine identity in the Godhead. In so doing, he emphasizes the unity and singleness of purpose of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost and the importance of baptism in the plan of salvation (3 Ne. 11:30–41). He then describes key gospel values and their associated behaviors, announcing in the process that the Law of Moses is fulfilled (3 Ne. 12–15). Following a brief rehearsal of the related covenant of the chosen people, Christ miraculously blesses and heals the assembled Nephites and their children. He also institutes among them the sacrament, instructing them of its relation to His gospel and authorizing the twelve disciples to bestow the Holy Ghost on those who have accepted the covenant through baptism (3 Ne. 16–18). The disciples then go throughout the assembled congregation, teaching the gospel, baptizing, and giving the Holy Ghost precisely as directed by Christ, after which Christ provides the emblems of his sacrifice for the sacrament. As a result the congregation is filled with the Holy Ghost (3 Ne. 19:1–20:9). After prophesying regarding the fulfillment of the covenants of salvation in the latter days and instructing the Nephites how to complete the record of Samuel's prophecies on the signs of Christ's resurrection (3 Ne. 20:9–26:11; 29–30), Christ identifies this covenant community as a “church” and informs the disciples to call it after His name (3 Ne. 27:1–12). He then summarizes the purpose of His gospel and the church, which are both centered on His atoning sacrifice: to draw all mankind unto Him so they might (1) be “judged according to their works,” (2) “stand spotless before me at the last day,” and (3) “be lifted up at the last day”—all characteristics of salvation (3 Ne. 27:13–22).

After Christ renews the gospel covenant, organizes his church, and institutes its associated ordinances—the converted Nephites share these blessings with the people “upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites.” Eventually the people are converted unto Christ to such an extent that they institute a spiritual utopia, the likes of which the world has rarely witnessed. Peace, joy, unity, well-being, spiritual gifts, miracles, prosperity, devotion, love, and righteousness pervade and unite the people for nearly two centuries. Thus, they are collectively known as “children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God” (4 Ne. 1:1–20).

### **Rejecting the covenant and realizing its disastrous consequences (4 Nephi 1:20–Mormon 7)**

Eventually, a small group revolt from the church, adopt the name “Lamanites,” and initiate the downward spiral that results in the complete destruction of this holy society. Once the “children of Christ”

begin to reject and fight against the covenant that had blessed and distinguished them for centuries, their eventual complete destruction becomes inevitable. The covenant of Christ's gospel informs Mormon's account of this catastrophe.

Initially Mormon identifies pride, selfishness, and social stratification as causes of this decline. He then observes that the people "began to build up churches unto themselves to get gain and began to deny the true church of Christ," i.e. priestcrafts, in the sense described above. Religious diversity "did multiply exceedingly because of iniquity, and because of the power of Satan." These churches deny the Christ and begin to persecute members of the church of Christ: cast them into prison, "seek to kill them," and "cast them into furnaces of fire...[and] dens of wild beasts." Their "many priests and false prophets...do all manner of iniquity...[and] smite upon the people of Jesus." Mormon contrasts the Nephites who "dwindle in unbelief and wickedness" with the Lamanites who "willfully rebel against the gospel of Christ." He next observes that "the people began again to build up the secret oaths and combinations of Gadianton," *secret combinations*, in the sense described above. Mormon concludes this portion of his account with the lament, "the people of Nephi and the Lamanites had become exceedingly wicked one like unto another...the robbers of Gadianton did spread over all the face of the land; and there were none that were righteous save it were the disciples of Jesus" (4 Ne. 1:24–45).

Miracles and other spiritual manifestations cease among the Nephites "because of their wickedness and unbelief," and the "beloved disciples" are removed from their presence. Even the Nephites themselves "willfully rebelled against their God" and introduce "sorceries, and witchcrafts, and magics." Mormon then observes, "The power of the evil one was wrought upon all the face of the land," "the land was filled with robbers and with Lamanites," and "there was blood and carnage...and one complete revolution throughout all the face of the land."<sup>59</sup>

In the remainder of his abridgment, Mormon chronicles (1) the progressive depravity of his people, (2) the resulting slaughter of men, women, and children, and (3) the complete disintegration of the moral fabric of society, as reflected in the following excerpts:

The people of Nephi were again hunted and driven. (Morm. 2:20)

We had become weak like unto our brethren. (Morm. 2:26)

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59 Morm. 1:14–16, 19; 2:8–9.

They began to boast in their own strength, and began to swear [vengeance] before the heavens. (Morm. 3:9)

The armies of the Nephites went up unto the [armies of] the Lamanites. (Morm. 4:4)

[The Lamanites] did offer them [Nephite prisoners “both women and children”] up as sacrifices unto their idol gods. (Morm. 4:14)

And from this time forth did the Nephites gain no power over the Lamanites, but began to be swept off by them even as the dew before the sun. (Morm. 4:18)

Mormon completes his abridgment with a poignant lament for his people who are now destroyed and a rehearsal of the latter-day promises that are extended to Lehi's descendants. The covenant of Christ's gospel figures prominently in this conclusion. The intent of Mormon's record is that these people “may be persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God...[and] may more fully believe his gospel.” “Then will the Lord remember the covenant which he made unto Abraham” (Morm. 5:14–15, 20). Mormon's final plea involves the conditions and blessings of the plan of salvation: faith in Jesus Christ, repentance for sins, baptism by water and the Holy Ghost, “lay[ing] hold upon the gospel of Christ,” “following the example of the Savior,” being resurrected, experiencing the judgment, and being redeemed through the atonement of Christ, and entering into “the presence of God in his kingdom” (Morm. 6:20–7:10).

### Moroni's Abridgment

Moroni's contributions to the Book of Mormon consist of (1) concluding his father's abridgment (Morm. 8–9), (2) abridging the Jaredite record (Ether 1–15), (3) adding essential details to the Nephite record (Moro. 1–9), and (4) recording his final testimony (Moro. 10). Because these segments are quite different from one another, I consider separately the covenant of Christ's gospel in each, following a general summary of Moroni's use of the names for Jesus Christ.

Moroni follows Mormon and Nephi in privileging *Lord* and *God* as the most frequent divine names in his record, using them 208 and 158 times respectively. Moroni also follows his father in employing *Christ* (102) and *Jesus* (34) as the main secondary names. Only one other divine name appears more than ten times in Moroni's record: *Son of God* and its variants. His record also includes a total of only a dozen different divine

names, far fewer than Nephi's and Mormon's more extensive lists.<sup>60</sup> As Nephi and Mormon before him, Moroni also links the various names of Christ to emphasize His multifaceted and comprehensive mission:

I will show unto you a God of miracles, even the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and it is that same God who created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are. Behold, he created Adam, and by Adam came the fall of man. And because of the fall of man came Jesus Christ, even the Father and the Son, and because of Jesus Christ came the redemption of man. (Morm. 9:11–12)

### **Concluding his father's abridgment (Mormon 8–9)**

Moroni's brief conclusion to Mormon's record has four primary purposes:

1. Reinforcing his father's account of the depravity and destruction of his people (Morm. 8:1–11). Moroni concludes his own poignant witness to this catastrophe with the lament, "And there are none that do know the true God save it be the disciples of Jesus who did tarry in the land until the wickedness of the people was so great that the Lord would not suffer them to remain."
2. Commenting on the nature and latter-day purpose of the Nephite record (Morm. 8:12–24; 9:32–37). Moroni informs the latter-day steward of this record that he will have God's power "to bring it to light" but only for the purpose of achieving God's glory, which he defines as "the welfare of the ancient and dispersed covenant people of the Lord." Moroni testifies that God "will remember the covenant which he hath made with them" on condition of their prayers to Him and their faith in Him.
3. Prophesying of abundant evil in the latter days (Morm. 8:25–41). Moroni mentions the churches that are "built up" unto men, characterizing them with words and phrases reminiscent of Nephi's earlier prophecies: "get gain," "pride of your hearts," "envyings, and strifes, and malice, and persecutions, and all manner of iniquities," "polluted," "love money," "praise of the world," and "secret abominations."

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<sup>60</sup> Shapiro, *Exhaustive Concordance*, s.v., "Lord," "God," "Jesus," "Christ," "Son (of God)," "Lamb (of God)," "Eternal (God or Father)," "Savior," "Redeemer," "Judge," and "Father."

4. Bearing witness of the plan of salvation (Morm. 9:1–31). Moroni specifically addresses “those who do not believe in Christ,” whom he identifies, following Nephi, as the “Lamb of God.” He warns unbelievers of the dire spiritual consequences if they continue to “deny the Christ:” they will “dwell...under a consciousness of...guilt” and “with the damned souls in hell.” As a corrective, he instructs them, “Turn ye unto the Lord” with the contrasting covenant promises and warnings: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.... See that ye are not baptized unworthily; see that ye partake not of the sacrament of Christ unworthily; but see that ye do all things in worthiness, and do it in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God; and if ye do this, and endure to the end, ye will in no wise be cast out.”

### **Abridging the Jaredite record (Ether 1–15)**

According to Mormon and Moroni, abridging the twenty-four plates of Ether is Moroni’s principal contribution to the Book of Mormon.<sup>61</sup> The record’s anachronistic placement in the Book of Mormon and the specific nature of Moroni’s abridgment reveal Mormon’s and Moroni’s primary intent for its inclusion.

Moroni’s abridgment is more truncated and less detailed than every other portion of the Book of Mormon, with the exceptions of the tiny books of Omni and 4 Nephi. The history of more than thirty generations is summarized in approximately thirty pages of translation. This abbreviation is even more extreme when it is realized that Mormon’s own commentaries occupy about one-fourth of the resulting text, a considerably higher percentage than his father’s editorial asides. Moroni’s commentaries amplify four related themes, drawn from Nephi’s and Mormon’s accounts: (1) covenants of the Lord and their consequences for the covenant people;<sup>62</sup> (2) identity and mission of Jesus Christ;<sup>63</sup> (3) the gospel of Christ and the plan of salvation;<sup>64</sup> and (4) nature and purpose of the Nephite records.<sup>65</sup>

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61 Mosiah 28:17–19; Moro. 1:1; 9:24.

62 Ether 2:8–12; 8:18–26.

63 Ether 3:17–20; 4:17–19; 12:26–41.

64 Ether 12:6–41; 13:5–13.

65 Ether 1:1–5; 3:21–28; 4:1–5:6; 12:20–25.

Moroni's abridgment of the Jaredite story itself develops two main themes. The most detailed portion of the narrative emphasizes the brother of Jared's encounters of with the pre-mortal Jesus Christ,<sup>66</sup> while the most extensive portion annotates the genealogy of Jaredite leaders, initially given in Ether 1:7–32.<sup>67</sup> Moroni's annotations provide little more information than whether the leaders were righteous or wicked and the social consequences of their lifestyles.

These features of Moroni's abridgment along with its placement at the end of the Book of Mormon imply that Mormon and Moroni intend that it not be considered a stand-alone contribution but rather that it serve as an additional witness to the core truths of the Nephite record as crafted by Nephi and Mormon, specifically that: (1) Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior of the world, (2) the gospel [doctrine] of Christ is the plan of salvation for all mankind,<sup>68</sup> (3) covenants and their related ordinances are the formal means for extending the blessings of salvation to all mankind, and (4) the Book of Mormon is a primary means for restoring to earth in the latter days God's eternal covenants of salvation.

### **Adding essential details (Moroni 1–9)**

Moroni does not anticipate being able to add to the Nephite record after completing the abridgment of the Jaredite record (Moro. 1:1–4). However, being blessed with unused plates, extended days, and a continued measure of safety, he produces what in other writings might be called an appendix. The covenant of Christ's gospel pervades the contents of this section of his record.

He begins the appendix with a summary of essential activities of the church of Christ, including the manner of ordaining candidates to offices in the priesthood (Moro. 2–3), administering the sacrament of the Lord's supper (Moro. 4–5), determining the worthiness of candidates for baptism (Moro. 6:1–4), and conducting congregational worship services (Moro. 6:5–9). Moroni next includes a sermon by Mormon on the spiritual gifts of faith, hope, and charity (Moro. 7), followed by two epistles from his father that address (a) the false practice of infant

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<sup>66</sup> Ether 1:34–43; 2:13–3:16.

<sup>67</sup> Ether 6:1–8:17; 9:1–12:5; 13:1–4; 13:14–15:32.

<sup>68</sup> Ether 3:13 contains a specific promise of eternal life extended to the brother of Jared that is comparable to individual promises of salvation in Nephi's and Mormon's respective accounts: "Because thou knowest these things ye are redeemed from the fall; therefore ye are brought back into my presence."

baptism, (b) abominations on both sides of the on-going civil war, and (c) the need to complete the sacred Nephite record (Moro. 8–9).

### **Moroni's final testimony (Moroni 10)**

Moroni closes his record with his testimony of the record before it is sealed and cached away for future generations. Three key points relate to the covenant of Christ's gospel: gaining a testimony of the truth (Moro. 10:3–7); developing gifts of the Spirit and the godly virtues of faith, hope, and charity (Moro. 10:8–23); and inviting all mankind to “come unto Christ and be perfected in him” (Moro. 10:24–34).

### **Conclusion**

This study suggests that while the writers of the Book of Mormon occasionally refer to it as a history,<sup>69</sup> it is not a history in the conventional academic sense: its purpose is ideological and persuasive not documentary and descriptive; it is highly selective, not comprehensive in its inclusion of material;<sup>70</sup> and the authors' criteria for selecting, organizing, and interpreting its contents are established by divine communication—e.g., visions, dreams, and revelations—not secular philosophies and professional methodologies. In short, the Book of Mormon articulates an eternal perspective in which God and Christ are the central figures in the story, even though they are seldom “on stage;” human actions of all kinds are explained largely in terms of divine covenants, one of which is the covenant of Christ's gospel; and covenants are a formal means for realizing God's ultimate purpose—eternal life in His presence for all His children.

While there is yet much to learn about the Book of Mormon through study and faith (see D&C 88:118), a promising field of continuing examination is literary studies—the serious and systematic analysis of the text itself. While cultural studies, scientific studies, and historical studies reveal many insights into this sacred record, literary studies may have the most to add since the written text is the best evidence to date of its origins, identity, and meaning.

The Book of Mormon serves as “another testament of Jesus Christ” by demonstrating that His power and influence are as ubiquitous and consequential for mankind as the air they breathe, the water they drink, the earth on which they stand, and the light by which they see. The key to this worldview is spiritual. To be sure, this perspective has many

<sup>69</sup> 1 Ne. 9:2; 2 Ne. 4:14; 5:33; Jacob 1:2–3.

<sup>70</sup> See Jacob 3:13; Words of Mormon 1:5; Hel. 3:14; 3 Ne. 5:8; 26:6; Ether 15:33.

documentary and empirical dimensions, and it clearly acknowledges the existence and necessity of mankind's moral agency (e.g., 2 Ne. 2). Nevertheless, it repeatedly is grounded by the fundamental assertion, "for there is a God,"<sup>71</sup> and builds on the premises that all mankind are His children, that He has prepared an eternal plan to realize their divine potential, and that mortality is an essential part of the plan. The plan of salvation is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the commitment and formal mechanism to fulfill its purpose is the covenant of Christ's gospel.

In the Book of Mormon, the covenant of Christ's gospel pervades the text more than any other single theme, defining and interpreting much of mankind's spiritual consciousness, moral values, historical experiences, social relationships, and eternal consequences. The Book of Mormon accounts for several millennia of human experience largely in terms of this simple yet powerful, sophisticated, comprehensive, and integrated perspective. The extended and complex *horizontal* connections among the Jaredites, Nephites, Lamanites, Mulekites, and latter-day Jews and Gentiles are made explicit and meaningful by their respective encounters with the gospel of Jesus Christ. More important than documenting the horizontal connections among human groups of the past, present, and future—history for the writers of the Book of Mormon is the means of illuminating the network of *vertical* connections between mankind and God. By demonstrating in detail the significance of these vertical connections in the extended families of Lehi, Mulek, and Ether—the Book of Mormon leaves no doubt that covenants with God are the foundation of mankind's continued existence on earth and the basis of their hope for eternal life. The global perspective of the Book of Mormon bears witness to modern readers of the universal strength and eternal significance of the vertical connections with God, with the assurance of the value of their faithful and persistent efforts to "come unto Christ and be perfected in him" (Moro. 10:32) and of the devastating consequences for abandoning or failing in the attempt.

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71 See 2 Ne. 2:14; 11:7; Alma 30:44.

Restored: Historical Foundations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints *and* Presidents of the Church *at the Church History Museum; the historic site restorations, Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith Farm and Sacred Grove and Book of Mormon Historic Publication Site (western New York), Historic Kirtland and John and Else Johnson Home (northeast Ohio), Cove Fort and Brigham Young Winter Home (Utah); and the Church History Library in Salt Lake City.*

