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“ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT OF REVELATION AND PROPHECY”: ALMA₂’S PROPHETIC WARNING OF CHRIST’S COMING TO THE LEHITES (AND OTHERS)

Scott Stenson

Abstract: *Some students of the Book of Mormon have felt that while the coming of the Lord to the Lehites was clearly revealed to and taught by Nephi₁, those prophecies having to do with the subject may not have been widely circulated or continuously preserved among the Nephites, while others have argued for continuity of knowledge about Nephi₁’s prophecies among writers and their contemporary audiences. Reexamination of the Book of Mormon in light of these issues reveals that the teaching that Christ would appear among the Lehites was actually taught with some consistency by Alma₂ and was, it would seem, common knowledge among the Nephites. It appears that the predicted coming was well established, even if the nature of it was not. Specifically, I argue that Alma₂ often taught of the coming of Christ to the Lehites but in context with other events such as Jesus’s coming to the Jews and to others not of the known fold. To make this case, I concentrate on Alma₂’s writings, especially those in Alma 5 (borrowing liberally also from Alma 7, 13, 16, 39, Helaman 16:4–5, 13–14, and 3 Nephi 8–10). Alma 5 houses many prophetic statements that urgently point to the coming of the Lord to the Nephite church. The value of this approach is to attempt to demonstrate that Alma 5 contains more than has been supposed and, in effect, challenges claims for discontinuity in the middle portion of the Nephite record. This approach should tend to renew our interest in the other nuanced teachings of the prophet Alma₂ and others.*

Yea, thus sayeth the Spirit: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand; yea, the Son of God cometh in his glory, in his might, majesty, power, and dominion. Yea, my beloved brethren, I say unto you, that the

Spirit sayeth: Behold the glory of the King of all the earth; and also the King of heaven shall very soon shine forth among all the children of men. (Alma 5:50)

This representative passage above from Alma₂'s sermon at Zarahemla is taken from the middle portion of the Book of Mormon. It is one of many such passages. It demonstrates that the anticipated coming of the Lord, an important subject to Nephite believers,¹ was nevertheless a complex doctrine with implications beyond Jesus's birth, life, and atoning sacrifice. This scripture suggests that the "Son of God" (Alma 5:50), whom Alma₂ in the same sermon repeatedly refers to as the "good shepherd," would personally minister — "shine forth among ... the children of men" — unto many peoples, some of whom had been prepared by intense prophetic and angelic activity to receive him and his word/voice (Alma 5:38–39, 41, 57, 60).² Alma₂ himself urgently prepares "[his] people" for the approaching event (Alma 5:51). Indeed, the Lord's semi-universal first coming to the earth ("semi-universal" refers to His ministry after the Resurrection to other select peoples around the earth, including the Nephites and Lamanites) is described at points like the universal Second Coming itself, full of power and glory. Alma 13:22, 24 (verses taken from Alma₂'s contemporary teachings to Ammonihah) demonstrate certain factors potentially affecting our understanding of this significant subject. In Alma 13, we learn that angels were visiting "all nations" before the Lord was born among the Jews (Alma 13:22; see also Alma 10:20–21). We learn that the Nephites were not only apprised of Jesus's pending coming among the Jews and his redemption for all men — the "glad tidings" — but also that he would come "among all his people, yea, even to them that are scattered abroad upon the face of the earth" (Alma 13:22). They would receive from him "his word at the time of his coming in his [resurrected] glory" (Alma 13:22, 24).³ Alma₂'s

1. The Nephite interest in the subject of Christ's coming can in part be attributed to the fact that they kept the Law of Moses and possessed an extensive account of the prophetic teachings on the brass plates. The Nephites were aware that they had been broken off from the house of Israel and that their salvation and restoration, according to the covenants made to the fathers, centered in and depended upon Christ.

2. The work of angels (and prophets) is to literally prepare the way of the Lord (see Mosiah 3:13).

3. This teaching, in the form of the words of Zenos cited in 1 Nephi 19:10–11, would have been available to Alma₂ on the brass plates. It also was available to him on the small plates of Nephi₁.

teachings are consistent with Nephi₁'s (and Zenos's) but, surprisingly, may reach even further than his focus on the Lord's coming to the seed of Lehi₁.

Alma₂'s prophecies concerning the coming of the Lord to the Lehites (and others) are the subject of this paper. I will suggest that the small plates of Nephi₁ correspond with, and thus may have influenced, Alma₂'s teachings on this subject. Alma₂ may have been introduced to this subject through the many records his people inherited (it likely also belonged to Nephite oral tradition), but it seems to have been spiritually confirmed to him by the "Holy Spirit of God" (Alma 5:46). Here, it is my primary claim that these truths were generally known by Alma₂ and his people. And yet, he sought to better understand them that he might prepare his people for Christ's coming to them. He came to understand certain related truths for himself, it would seem, by cultivating the spirit of revelation and prophecy. Although Alma₂ powerfully taught the urgency of preparing for the Lord's visit to them, he does not appear to know exactly *when* or *how* it would occur. The event, it seems, was anticipated by the faithful, but no one can explain it with precision.⁴ This ambiguity around the precise nature of the predicted event may account for why the subject was not more frequently and plainly referenced after Nephi₁.⁵ A secondary objective of this study will be to demonstrate, using scriptures attributed to Alma₂ and others (see Alma 5, 7, 13, 16, 39, Helaman 16:4–5, 13–14, and 3 Nephi 8–10), the semi-universal nature of the Lord's ministry in the first century. Alma₂ appears to teach the post-resurrection ministry of Christ better than anyone (including Nephi₁) before the other-sheep doctrine is clearly expounded in 3 Nephi 15. In short, I argue for doctrinal continuity between at least Nephi₁ and Alma₂, if not also through 3 Nephi 11.

Alma₂ possessed in great measure what he termed the "spirit of revelation and prophecy" (Alma 4:20). His initial sermons in the Book of Mormon are bracketed by the idea (Alma 4:20; Alma 43:2). The Holy Spirit often inspired Alma₂, opening his mouth that he might declare the truth in the present and prophesy of the future. His sermons are

4. The question in part is how to reconcile temporally and geographically the Lord's atonement in the Old World with his ministry in the New World.

5. I imagine the Nephite relationship to the doctrine of the Lord's coming to them to be much like Latter-day Saints' relationship to the doctrine of the Second Coming. We know it is going to occur, but when and how and how many visits will be involved are not known. We have a certainty of it happening but tend to teach it in a way that does not get too specific, since we do not understand the specifics.

among the most fascinating and intricate in scripture. Most of them appear in the first half of the book of Alma, where the editor and historian, Mormon, appears to provide them to his audience without much commentary. Significantly, each of them touches on the coming of Christ, but none perhaps as powerfully as that found in Alma 5. In Mosiah 27, we first encounter the newly converted Alma₂ as he comforts his father and confesses his sins to those persons assembled after the stunning visitation and exhortation of the angel to him and the sons of Mosiah. In Alma 5–14, we see Alma₂ urgently admonish the Nephites in Zarahemla (Alma 5), Gideon (Alma 7), and Ammonihah (Alma 9:8–30; 12:2, 12:3–13:30) to repent and be born again. In Alma 32:8–33:23, we find his discourse to the “poor in heart” among the Zoramites. In Alma 36–42, we discover his fatherly counsel to his three sons, Helaman (Alma 36–37), Shiblon (Alma 38), and Corianton (Alma 39–42). Although this is not an exhaustive accounting of all of Alma₂’s experiences and words in the Book of Mormon, this summary situates some of his most important teachings and prophecies. These recorded sermons and prophecies are remarkably textured and nuanced. Each one is grounded in the written word of God and presumably in the oral teachings of the Nephite fathers, and yet they, as indicated, may expand certain doctrinal subjects even further.⁶

Like King Benjamin, Alma₂ was custodian of the Nephite records and national artifacts, including the small plates of Nephi₁. Whether these plates were seamlessly transmitted from Nephi₁ to later writers (those of the middle period of the Book of Mormon) has been a point of discussion among scholars, one not without important interpretive implications. At least one scholar has advocated for *continuity* while many others have

6. For an in-depth structural analysis of the book of Alma one may consult Joseph M. Spencer’s work on the subject. Joseph M. Spencer, *The Anatomy of Book of Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2021), 1:105–15. Robert A. Rees has written that the book of Alma represents an “archetypal conflict” between “word and sword.” He states that Mormon includes five sermons from Alma₂ in the book of Alma. Included also is the reference to Alma₂’s words to his son, Corianton. Robert A. Rees, “Alma the Younger’s Seminal Sermon at Zarahemla,” in *Bountiful Harvest: Essays in Honor of S. Kent Brown*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner, D. Morgan Davis, and Carl Griffin (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2011), 329–31, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?filename=17&article=1016&context=mi&type=additional>. John W. Welch has said that Alma₂ may have as many as “ten speeches” in the Book of Mormon, “not to mention several other shorter ... texts.” John W. Welch, “The Testimony of Alma: ‘Give Ear to My Words,’” *Religious Educator* 11, no. 2 (July 2010): 69.

perceived *discontinuity* in the transmission of scriptural records, and thus in the transmission of doctrine. This second perspective is the more commonly held view and has much merit. Specifically, Matthew Roper favors basic continuity.⁷ Those who advocate for discontinuity include Brent Metcalfe,⁸ Rebecca Roesler,⁹ Grant Hardy,¹⁰ and others. I suggest, not unlike Roper, that the case for discontinuity of transmission bears the greater burden of proof. Roper asserts that the Book of Mormon clearly teaches that Christ's coming to the Lehites was known and taught by Alma₂ during the middle period of the Book of Mormon. In some deference to those persons who subscribe to discontinuity (a claim that in no way threatens the veracity of the Nephite record), I am less confident in the straightforwardness of the record than Roper appears to be. Continuity is present, but in certain places must be teased out by a close reading. Thus, I differ from Roper (and the others) in at least three ways: 1) although I accept the continuity claim, I am less sure that continuity is as obviously manifest as Roper indicates; 2) my effort is to suggest that Alma 5 is a text that demonstrates both continuity and Alma₂'s further search for a more refined and expanded understanding (Roper does not explore Alma 5, though he cites it); and 3) I assert that Alma₂'s apparent confusion or reticence in part stems from his strong sense that the prophecies touch on more than the Lord's life in Palestine, even reaching perhaps beyond his own land. The prophecies describe the coming of the Lord in the first century in a complex and even somewhat universal way. This argument for Alma₂'s sense of a semi-universal coming, and the enigmatic times and seasons associated with it, appear to have led Alma₂ to wonder about those truths his fathers had taught about Christ's coming to the Jews, to them, and perhaps to others.

7. Matthew Roper, "A More Perfect Priority?," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 1 (1994): 362–78, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol6/iss1/12/>.

8. 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: Signature Books, 1993), 395–444.

9. Rebecca A. Roesler, "Plain and Precious Things Lost: The Small Plates of Nephi," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 52, no. 2 (2019): 85–106, <https://doi.org/10.5406/dialjmormthou.52.2.0085>.

10. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 180–84.

The Case for Discontinuity

Those scholars who subscribe to discontinuity cite problem passages such as those below. In general, the argument for discontinuity understands the relative silence of the Book of Mormon text after Nephi₁ as grounds for suggesting the loss of the small plates of Nephi₁ or the neglect of them during the middle portion of the Book of Mormon.¹¹ For instance, Roesler in her response to the debate between Metcalfe and Roper and their schools of thought seems to confuse the content of some of the passages she cites. For example, she writes, “He [Alma₂] does not know when Christ would come (Alma 13:25), how the event would happen (Alma 7:8), or details as to the timing of the Resurrection (Alma 40:4–5).”¹² But the lack of specific knowledge of timing shown in Alma 40:4–5 is about the distant future event when “all shall come forth from the dead” (Alma 40:4), not the Resurrection of Christ. Alma₂’s uncertainty in Alma 7:8, discussed hereafter, is not about the timing of Christ’s birth, but about whether or not Christ’s coming to the Lehites would be during his mortal life. Alma 13:25 is given emphasis in Roesler’s arguments for discontinuity as she later discusses Nephi₁’s six-hundred-year prophecy presumably about the birth of Christ, then quotes Alma 13:25 and concludes, “If Alma₂ searched the records available to him, he makes no indication of it.”¹³ She assumes Alma 13:25 is about the birth of Christ, but as with the other arguments for discontinuity, this is not supported by the cited verse, for the previous verse (Alma 13:24) gives context that contradicts Roesler’s interpretation:

For behold, angels are declaring it [the day of salvation] unto many at this time in our land; *and this is for the purpose of preparing the hearts of the children of men to receive his word at the time of his coming in his glory.*

And now we only await to hear the joyful news declared unto us by the mouth of angels, *of his [actual] coming*; for the time cometh, we know not how soon. Would to God it might be in my day; but let it be sooner or later, in it I will rejoice. (Alma 13:24–25)

The coming of Christ that Alma₂ is looking forward to is not his humble birth, but “his coming *in his glory*,” apparently a glorious

11. Roesler, “Plain and Precious Things,” 89–95, 98–100.

12. Ibid., 90.

13. Ibid. 93.

post-Resurrection visitation, as described in 3 Nephi, for which the people “in our [the Nephite’s] land” would need to be prepared so that they could receive Christ’s word at that time. While the timing of the birth of Christ was prophesied by Nephi₁, there was not a specific time given for his death, resurrection, or post-resurrection ministry. Alma₂’s unawareness of the details in timing for those events, however, does not imply ignorance of the small plates.

Roesler claims that Alma₂ does not understand the coming of the Lord to the Lehites until Alma 16:20. The problem is that he has alluded to it since at least Alma 5. Moreover, Alma 5–16 is a block of scripture that may read as one chronological unit: Alma₂’s tour of the church to regulate its congregations. Roesler seems to read Alma 37 and Alma 40 from a latter-day perspective. However, Alma 37:10–12 appears to refer to a non-latter-day work among the Lamanites. She judges Alma 40 in light of her knowledge of the doctrines involved. In short, Alma₂ understands the records and the resurrection but is disabusing his son’s mind about doctrinal complexities he has apparently encountered while among the Zoramites. Roesler does make many excellent points in her argument about variation, complexity, and development, but in the end, does not establish discontinuity. Indeed, she neglects some textual evidence for continuity even as she cites passages in support of her claim. For example, Alma 37 directly alludes to 1 Nephi 5 and the small plates record, as I will discuss later. Roesler accounts for the allusion by speculating about what was on the large plates of Nephi₁ and what must have belonged to the oral tradition. Ultimately it does not matter how doctrines came down to Alma₂ as long as he more or less had them. Continuity is continuity.

Those who argue for continuity find it hard to set aside the passages that positively address the subject after Nephi₁, some rather plainly. In what follows, then, I will briefly address these before moving forward (items 3 and 4 on the list below come *after* Alma₂’s writings, and therefore, are not of great concern here, although I will offer some suggestions that may begin to answer those understandable objections.) Even though I subscribe to continuity, I fully acknowledge that the character of the Book of Mormon on this subject of the Lord’s coming to the Lehites is a messy business. Here are some of the most common concerns about continuity phrased as questions:

1. Why would Nephi₁’s (and Lehi₁’s) plain prophecies that the Lord would come to earth six hundred years from the time of their departure from Jerusalem not be used after Nephi₁’s

- writing if the small plates were passed down and widely circulated (see 1 Nephi 10:4; 1 Nephi 19:8; 2 Nephi 25:19)?¹⁴
2. Why does Alma₂ suggest that he does not know whether the Lord will come to them, given how plain Nephi₁ was on the matter? He reportedly says this in Alma 7:8: “as to this thing [whether Christ will come to his people or not] I do not know.” Alma₂ then exhorts the people of Gideon to “Repent ... and prepare the way of the Lord ... for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth” (Alma 7:9). The statement that “the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth” is ambivalent. Exactly how will he come and to whom?
 3. Why would Mormon describe the people in Helaman 16:18–20 (about the time of Samuel the Lamanite) as though they were not aware of the Lord’s coming to them?¹⁵
 4. Why would the people gathered near the temple at Bountiful mistake Jesus for an “angel” at his coming if they were aware of the prophecies concerning his coming to them? (see 3 Nephi 11:8)

14. In his article, Roper quotes Metcalfe as saying, “Alma, Benjamin, and their audiences did not know what Lehi₁, Nephi₁, an angel, anonymous Old-World prophets, and their sacred literature had known with certainty: that Jesus would be born six hundred years after the Lehites departed for the Americas.” Metcalfe, Roper says, understands the Book of Mormon’s “purported anomalies” from a “naturalistic paradigm” that reads the Nephite record as a “fictional nineteenth-century narrative.” Roper acknowledges ambiguities but attempts to demonstrate that Metcalfe’s arguments can be easily refuted. Roper does acknowledge that Metcalfe raises a valid point about the six-hundred-years prophecy. Why would Lehi₁ and Nephi₁’s plain teachings on the Lord’s coming to the Old World not be specifically referenced by “Benjamin and Alma₂”? Roper unconvincingly speculates that the knowledge of Christ’s coming to the Jews was “considered a mystery, reserved for the faithful.” Roper, “More Perfect Priority,” 362–66.

15. Unbelief so often leads to misunderstanding. There is an irony in the passage as I read it. We have other accounts of unbelievers misunderstanding the ways of the Lord (see Alma 9:1–5; also Helaman 8:27–9:17). It is interesting to note that Helaman 4–5 follows a pattern established in Alma 4–5. Indeed, the writings of Helaman₂ in Mormon’s hands intersect with the prophecies of many prophets, including Nephi₁ (Zenos), Jacob (Zenos), Mosiah₂, and Alma₂. Helaman 16 begins with true prophecy and ends with conspiracy theories among the wicked. The wicked suggest that the Lord will not come among them, and yet they leave the door open when they say, in effect, that if it does appear to happen, we will know that it is “the cunning and mysterious arts of the evil one” (Helaman 16:21).

With such questions before us, it may be wise to acknowledge that the “Book of Mormon story is *not* structured around a *straightforward expectation* of Jesus’s post-resurrection appearance among the Nephites,”¹⁶ as Grant Hardy claims. But as I will demonstrate there is discernible continuity across the middle portion of the Nephite record. Granted, these passages can be easily misunderstood. Nevertheless, I believe that they may be at least partially explained. As mentioned, though, I make only a partial attempt here to answer the concerns that have to do with the Nephite expectation of the Lord’s visit after Alma₂ (i.e., Helaman 16:18–20 and 3 Nephi 11:8–12.). I do this to keep the focus on Alma₂ and so that this project does not get too lengthy. Finally, it may very well be that a conscientiousness of those prophecies anticipating the Lord’s coming to the Lehites waned during the decades of greatest conflict and wickedness *after* Alma₂ but *before* the Lord’s coming to Bountiful. That may be the case, but that is not my sense of it for the following reasons.

The Six-Hundred-Years Prophecy

The six-hundred-years prophecy appears three times in the Book of Mormon and all references to it are located in Nephi₁’s writings (see 1 Nephi 10:4; 1 Nephi 19:8; and 2 Nephi 25:19). For good reason, then, this has led the scholars advocating discontinuity to assume that knowledge of this category of prophecy (those referencing the six hundred years) was lost to the Nephites sometime after Nephi₁’s day. Indeed, other writers after Nephi₁ who speak of Christ’s coming do not seem to be aware of it or, at least, they do not allude to it. The six-hundred-years prophecy, however, anticipates the coming of Christ “*among the Jews*” (and, as indicated, may or may not refer to the *birth of the Lord*). One wonders if this language is a reference to the Lord’s birth or to his ministry? There is nothing in the phrase “raise up” that suggests it should refer to Christ’s birth instead of the time of his ministry. If the Nephites were not sure what specifically was to occur after six hundred years, the prophecy becomes much less useful for advocates of discontinuity.

Nephi₁ reports at the beginning of his own account that his father declared the following concerning the Jews in Jerusalem:

Yea, even six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem, a prophet would the Lord raise up among the Jews — even a Messiah, or, in other words, a Savior of the world. ...

16. Hardy, *Understanding*, 182, emphasis added.

And he [Lehi₁] spake also concerning a prophet [John the Baptist] who should come before the Messiah, to prepare the way of the Lord —

Yea, even he should go forth and cry in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight; for there standeth one among you whom ye know not; and he is mightier than I, whose shoes latchet I am unworthy to unloose. And much spake my father concerning this thing. (1 Nephi 10:4, 7–8)

This same prophecy is referenced again in 1 Nephi 19:8 and 2 Nephi 25:19. It marks time from the departure of Lehi₁ from Jerusalem (specific point in time) until the time a “prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews” (not citing the number of years or any other specific indicators of time). To use this prophecy to mark the coming of the Lord to the Lehites seems to be problematic at best, since neither Nephi₁ nor his prophetic successors become specific about the timing of that separate event. The chronological relationship between the Lord’s coming to the Lehites’ and the raising up of a prophet “among the Jews” is not discussed in the Book of Mormon. Nevertheless, why the later writers of the Book of Mormon after Nephi₁ do not reference this six-hundred-years prophecy directly is still an open question, but not one that negates the multiple predictions of the Lord’s coming to the Lehites found after Nephi₁.

Alma 7:8

Similarly, the scholars espousing discontinuity have, in my judgment, misappropriated Alma 7:8. Alma 7:8 is one of the best examples of complexity within the text over this issue of the Lord’s coming to the Jews as opposed to the Lehites. Citing Alma 7:8, for instance, Hardy asserts that even though Nephi₁ had plainly and repeatedly announced that the Lord would come to his own people (some five times), Alma₂ “does not know whether Jesus will come to the Nephites.” Hardy says, “he [Alma₂] later receives a revelation that this would be the case (Alma 45:10).”¹⁷ (Roesler places this revelatory shift in Alma₂’s paradigm at Alma 16.)

However, it becomes apparent that Hardy and Roesler have for the sake of argument chosen to overlook an important theological qualifier in Alma 7:8. Alma₂ has not said, “I do not say that he [Jesus] will come among us,” but he has characteristically clarified the extent of

17. Ibid.

his understanding using these words: “I do not say that he [Jesus] will come among us *at the time of his dwelling in his mortal tabernacle.*” The qualifying phrase — “at the time of his dwelling in his mortal tabernacle” — implies that Jesus, from Alma₂’s perspective, may come before or after that time, but likely not while he is tabernacled in mortal clay. Nevertheless, this qualifying detail with doctrinal implications is only of secondary importance in the passage, though of primary importance in this argument.

While in Gideon, Alma₂ has already clearly announced that there is “one thing of more importance than they all.” Using this language, he indirectly refers to that which the Lord will perform “among *his people* [the Jews]”: the blood atonement and resurrection (Alma 7:6–7, 10–13). So, in Alma 7:8 Alma₂ alludes to his knowledge of the Lord’s coming to Alma₂’s own people, even as he emphasizes Jesus’s coming to the Jews. Alma 7:8 gives us a glimpse into Alma₂’s potential gaps in doctrinal understanding. That is, Alma₂ is aware of the Lord’s coming to his people (Nephites), but he does not seem secure in his sense of its exact timing and nature. Thus, rather than say that the text is disjointed or disorienting (that is right to an extent), it might be more helpful to say that the qualifier in Alma 7:8 and its immediate context should be carefully considered.

In Alma 7:9, for example, the very next verse, we learn that Alma₂ who has spoken of the coming of the Lord to the Jews and has alluded to the Lord’s coming to Alma₂’s own people before or after Jesus’s ministry among them in the flesh, has been commanded to “Cry *unto this people* [his own people], saying — Repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight; for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God *cometh upon the face of the earth.*” Thus, Alma₂ underscores Jesus’s coming to the Jews, alludes to his coming to his (Alma₂’s) people and the urgent necessity thereof, and perhaps leaves the door open for the Lord’s post-resurrection ministry to extend even further. Alma 7:8, which, according to some, appears not to teach the coming of the Lord to the seed of Lehi, actually may allude to that, plus push the doctrine even further, since Jesus would [minister] “upon the face of the earth,” which may allow for a wider scope than we have supposed.

In contrast to Hardy and Roesler, then, I suggest that Alma₂ began his faithful inquiry into the doctrinal nuances of the coming of the Lord sometime after his conversion in Mosiah 27 but sometime before Alma 5. It is in Alma 5 that he references fasting and praying for an understanding

of the teachings of his fathers. He had presumably understood his fathers' prophetic teachings intellectually for some time, but he says that he came to know "of myself" by the "Holy Spirit of God" what he had not yet spiritually understood (Alma 5:45–47). This is not to say that Alma₂ at the time he records Alma 5 has already received a fullness of knowledge concerning his fathers' teachings, but it appears that he has come to understand for himself that Christ comes not only to the Jews to make atonement for all men but to his people, though he cannot say when or how that event will occur even after Alma 5.

Helaman 16

Helaman 16 poses some interpretive problems that are more formidable for scholars who subscribe to continuity. While Roper does not address this chapter, I believe that it may also be explained in a way that reasonably supports the claim of continuity. First, a word on the book of Helaman and the teachings of Samuel the Lamanite. Helaman, as Hardy has noted, is patterned in part after the book of Alma. That is, Mormon narratively patterns later accounts after earlier accounts. This creates unity in the record and some degree of consistency. It does not remove all complexity, however. To the contrary, it may actually create variation and complexity because it is an abridged and edited work. In Alma 5–16 the Nephite church dwindles and Alma₂ travels forth with others to strengthen it. Similarly, in Helaman the church declines and Nephi₂ and Lehi₂ and others (including Samuel the Lamanite) travel to preach and prophesy. Nephi₂ relinquishes his role as judge just as Alma₂ did. Both accounts have dramatic prison scenes, etc. Second, Samuel, instructed and sent forth by an angel, ministers to Zarahemla and Gideon as did Alma₂. His second sermon from the wall is prophetically eclectic. This may be because he speaks from the heart without prepared remarks and we do not have the full account. Samuel speaks in turn of Zarahemla's destruction by fire in not many years if the Nephites do not repent *and* of their utter destruction within four-hundred years. Samuel speaks of the signs of the Lord's birth and death, but in doing so, alludes to Nephi₁'s (Zenos's) teaching on the other sheep.¹⁸

18. It will be demonstrated later that in Helaman 14:20–29 Samuel borrows from Zenos's prophecy as recorded by Nephi₁ in 1 Nephi 19:10–11. In 1 Nephi 19:11–12, it is clear that Zenos alludes to the "other sheep" doctrine before it is called such at 3 Nephi 15:17. I can assert this because Zenos says that the Lord would "visit some with his voice" and others "with the thunderings and the lightings of his power

That is, Samuel converts the imagery of thunder and lightning (imagery found in 1 Nephi 19:10–12; 2 Nephi 26:3–9; 3 Nephi 8–10) from the middle part of his message (Helman 14:20–29) to the latter-day theme of the restoration of the Lamanites, a favorite subject of Nephi₁ and Jacob on the small plates. Perhaps reciting Nephi₁'s (Zenos's) words in proximity to Samuel's would help to establish the connection between the prophets and the doctrine.

1 Nephi 19:11–12

For thus spake the prophet: The Lord God surely shall visit all the house of Israel *at that day* [when the sign of darkness is manifest unto those of the house of Israel scattered like so many sheep upon the isles of the sea], some with his voice, because of their righteousness, unto their great joy and salvation, *and others with the thunderings and lightnings* of his power, by tempest, by fire, and by smoke, and vapor of darkness, *and by the opening of the earth...*

And all these things must surely come, saith the prophet Zenos. And the *rocks of the earth must rend.*

Helaman 14:20–22

But behold, as I said concerning another sign, a sign of his death, behold, *in that day*, that he shall suffer death the sun shall be darkened and refuse to give his light unto you. ...

Yea, at the time that he [the Lord] shall yield up the ghost there shall be *thunderings and lightnings* for the space of many hours, and the earth shall shake and tremble; and the *rocks* which are upon the face of this earth, which are both above the earth and beneath, which ye know at this time are solid, or the more part of it [rocky face of the earth] one solid mass, shall be *broken up*.

Yea, they [the rocks] shall be rent *in twain*.

Although Samuel's image of thunder and lightning and rending of the rocks of the earth is more in depth than Nephi₁'s offering to us of Zenos's writings on the subject, it is hard to miss the similarities. Each

... by fire, and by smoke, and vapor of darkness." The Lord teaches that those who would hear his "voice" would be his "other sheep."

passage refers to “that day,” the sign of darkness, the “thunderings and lightnings” and the rending of the “rocks.” Mormon, as we will later see, employs the same imagery, thus compelling us to connect the prophecies — past and present — to their fulfillment at the time of Christ’s coming to the Lehites. Samuel appears to have been influenced by either Nephi₁ or Zenos or both in his use of this imagery. All of this was fulfilled as Mormon relates later on in 3 Nephi 8–10.

That said, Helaman 16 appears to contradict the argument for continuity. In it, unbelievers seem unaware of any prophecy about the coming of the Lord to their lands. As I understand Mormon’s account, the so-called problem passage in Helaman 16:18–20 not only strongly alludes to Nephi₁’s writings (and prefigures the account of 3 Nephi) but it cites the view of unbelievers as opposed to faithful and informed members of the Nephite church.¹⁹ There were some righteous persons in Zarahemla, “this great city,” who would yet be preserved: “them will I spare” from “fire [which] should come down out of heaven” (see Helaman 12:12–14). The unbelievers undoubtedly were not as familiar with the various prophecies as the believers, much as unbelievers to this day have a tendency to misunderstand and misrepresent the beliefs of Latter-day Saints. (For instance, how many unbelievers in our day understand the scriptural prophecy that the Lord will come to a great gathering at Adam-ondi-Ahman, as in Doctrine and Covenants 116?) They had rejected the “spirit of prophecy” by which recorded prophecy is understood (Helaman 4:12, 23). In Helaman 16 the unbelievers all but admit that they are ignorant of the scriptures and prophecies. They say, “we are servants to their [our teachers] words,” “for we depend upon them to teach us the word” (Helaman 16:21). Once the unbelievers have made their case that the “tradition” that Christ is coming is a “wicked” one (Helaman 16:20), they reason that if he should come to the Jews (they seem to understand this much, even if they do not believe it) then why will he not minister also to us? (Helaman 16:18–20).

That the wicked in Helaman 16:18–20 should presuppose that the Lord would not come unto the Nephites is interesting but hardly disqualifying, since they also advocate other erroneous ideas that had

19. In Helaman, we learn that many church members in these decades before the coming of Jesus began to deny the “spirit of prophecy” (see Helaman 4:1, 11–12, and 23). Nevertheless, in time they began to “remember the prophecies of Alma, and also the words of King Benjamin” (Helaman 4:21). Belief in the prophecies continued to wane among many. Thus, they could not understand them or just forgot them (see Helaman 16:13–23).

been in circulation since at least the time of Korihor (contemporary with Alma₂). In his attack on the Nephite church, Korihor, an anti-Christ (or a man against messianic prophecy), uses a similar line of reasoning. He claims that Alma₂ and his associates have kept the people “down” in “ignorance” due to their “words” (Alma 30:23) that they might “glut [themselves] upon the labors of this people” (Alma 30:27, 31–32). This fabrication Korihor has concocted because he is possessed of a “lying spirit,” having before “put off the Spirit of God” (Alma 30:42).²⁰ Korihor, a zealous antagonist of all true prophecy, says that the church follows “the silly traditions of their fathers” concerning Christ’s coming (Alma 30:31). He needles the Nephites accordingly: “why do ye yoke yourselves with such foolish things? *Why do ye look for a Christ?* For no man can know of anything which is to come” (Alma 30:13). However, the account makes it clear that Korihor’s teachings (teachings imparted to him by a false angel) were a clever perversion of the truths contained in the prophecies. Like the people of Samuel’s day, Korihor would not believe in what he could not see. His method of deception (much as theirs may have been) was to use half-truths to confuse the people about the fundamental teachings of the church.²¹ The material point here is that this apparent apostate turned atheist with a particular hostility to prophecy utterly misrepresents the doctrines of the Nephite church and its leaders in the decades before the Lord’s coming to earth.

20. On the agenda of Korihor and his possible relationship to the Zoramites, see Godfrey J. Ellis, “The Rise and Fall of Korihor, a Zoramite: A New Look at the Failed Mission of an Agent of Zoram,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 48 (2021): 49–94, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-rise-and-fall-of-korihor-a-zoramite-a-new-look-at-the-failed-mission-of-an-agent-of-zoram/>.

21. Korihor summarizes some of the teachings of the church in Alma₂’s day. There is only one problem: he perverts them almost beyond recognition. At one point, Korihor says this: “Ye say that this people is a guilty and a fallen people, because of the transgression of a parent.” Then he says, “Behold, I say that a child is not guilty because of its parents” (Alma 30:25). From this disingenuous summary we can see that Korihor cunningly twists the doctrine of the Fall as taught by Alma₂ and his fathers. Men and women are fallen, yes, but they are not guilty of their first parents’ transgression. If we were to use Korihor as our sole guide, we would assume that the Nephite church believed in what is now called “original sin” and original guilt, but that was not what the fathers or others after Alma₂ had taught (see 2 Nephi 2:4, 26–27; also Helaman 15:4–16), nor what Alma₂ and his brethren taught (Alma 29:3–5; 41:2–8). According to the law of restoration, each person is free to be an agent “unto himself” (Helaman 14:30–31). Unbelievers cannot be trusted to authoritatively expound upon doctrine for obvious reasons.

Interestingly, Alma₂'s response to Korihor's campaign of confusion, misrepresentation, and lying was to ask a few simple questions. (It was a question also asked by the "high priest" in Gideon [Alma 30:22].) Once Korihor is brought to stand before him in Zarahemla, Alma₂ reminds him of his relatively recent "travels round about the land to declare the word of God," and then he sets the record straight as pertaining to the man's accusations/talking points (talking points he has come to believe for himself because of his repeated employment of them: [Alma 30:53]):

And now, if we [Alma₂ and his brethren of the church] do not receive anything for our labors in the church, what doth it profit us to labor in the church save it were to declare the truth, that we may have rejoicings *in the joy of our brethren?*

Then [Alma₂ asks his interlocutor] why sayest thou that we preach unto this people to get gain, when thou, of thyself, knowest that we receive no gain? And now, believest thou that we deceive this people, *that causes such joy in their hearts?* (Alma 30:34–35)²²

While raising these and other questions, Alma₂ testifies that he knows Christ shall come (Alma 30:39), suggesting that the church's focus on the coming of Christ at that season was a source of great joy to the people of the Nephite church. The anticipation of the Lord's coming to earth presumably has created an unusual excitement among the church members, even though it is decades before the Lord actually arrives among them. They seem to anticipate his coming to the Jews, and given their great excitement and the nature of the prophecies that were available to them, they are particularly thrilled that the Lord will visit them. That Korihor has chosen to attack this righteous people's interest in the prophecies of Christ's coming is suggestive that he believes (and Satan knows) that if he can cast doubt here that he will succeed in his quest to destroy the work of God.

22. Although this passage does not specifically state that Alma₂ spoke of "glad tidings" (we have seen that he declared them elsewhere before we encounter the story of Korihor), just nine chapters later (about the same time) he does speak to Corianton about the "glad tidings" of Christ's ministry and mission among the Jews in context with the Lord's coming to the Lehighites (see Alma 39:15–19). Alma₂ says that Corianton was to declare these glad tidings among "this people" that "they may prepare the minds of their children to hear the word at the time of his coming" among them. Glad tidings, joy, and/or rejoicing are often associated with these doctrines (see Alma 13:22–25).

The material above demonstrates that it is not disconcerting that the unbelievers in Samuel's day appear to teach concepts that contradict the prophecies as expounded through the generations by Alma₂ and his fathers. Like Korihor, they have developed their talking-points, and because of their repeated use, they (it would appear) have become integrated into their understanding despite the believers' teachings and objections to the contrary. It is as if the unbelievers teach what they want to believe and have no interest in the spirit of truth.

In Helaman 16, Mormon appears to include what he calls the "foolish and vain" imaginations of the unbelievers (in their own words) to create a sense of dramatic irony in his narrative account. He is a historian, but he is also telling a story in a way that dramatizes the deception and ignorance of those who oppose the prophets and their words.²³ Mormon seeks to prove that the word of prophecy is sure and to demonstrate the manifest ignorance of the unbelievers, who are not even aware of the ridiculous nature of their reasoning. It is admittedly less clear, however, why Samuel may not directly refer to the Lord's coming to them in Helaman 13–15. As indicated, he appears to have desired to do so, but when rejected, he returns with another message, one of destruction by fire if they do not repent. Samuel cries unto the people of Zarahemla, "repent and prepare the way of the Lord" lest ye be "hewn down and cast into the fire" (Helman 14:18; here he speaks of the ultimate spiritual death). In many ways his teachings anticipate the events of 3 Nephi even as they allude to the prophecies of that very coming. Samuel appears

23. Mormon also uses the account of Korihor to dramatize the fate of those who oppose prophecy. Korihor suffers poetic justice by being reduced to a beggar who goes about from "house to house" and who is eventually "trodden down, even until he was dead" while among the Zoramites (Alma 30:58–59; see also Ellis, "Rise and Fall"). This horrible ending is likely included to demonstrate the fate of those who oppose prophecy. It dramatically illustrates the justice of God upon those who deceive the people and misrepresent his servants. Incidentally, it appears that the Zoramites among whom Korihor begs and is killed are likely composed of separatists from Zarahemla. They may even include some of those who were present in Zarahemla when Alma₂ delivered his message to the church (see Alma 5). His final exhortation while in Zarahemla was to "be ye separate" (Alma 5:57). The Zoramites have separated themselves from their own brethren. They may have done this as an ironic gesture in response to Alma₂'s teaching. Of course, Alma₂ would have rather that they repented and prepared themselves for that which is to come. Instead, though, they have separated and entered into "great errors" and inscrutable ideas about God (and Christ) and matters such as the resurrection (Alma 31:9). Like the people in Samuel's day, "they did pervert the ways of the Lord in very many instances" (Alma 31:11).

to be one of those “just and holy men” that Alma₂ said the Lord would send to prepare the way of the Lord closer to his coming (Alma 13:26). Finally, it should be remembered that we do not have all of Samuel’s words. Most importantly, we do not have his initial sermon when he spoke of glad tidings (we may get a glimpse at this initial material in Helaman 14:2–13).

3 Nephi 11

In 3 Nephi 11:2, 10, the multitude gathered at the temple were believers discussing the “sign [that] had been given [by the prophets]” and were only temporarily confused at the descent of the angel-figure who identified himself as “Jesus Christ, *whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.*”²⁴ This is not surprising given, as I will demonstrate, that there had been much angelic activity in the land in preparation for the Lord’s coming. The multitude’s disorientation does not suggest that they were not aware of the Lord’s eventual coming to them. The sign of three days of darkness (and Jesus’s resurrection [see 2 Nephi 26:3, 8]) had been spoken of long before Samuel the Lamanite by Nephi₁ (Zenos) in context with the Lord’s planned appearances to the house of Israel (see 1 Nephi 19:10–11; also 2 Nephi 26:3, 8–9). As mentioned, Samuel had called upon these writings. He also gives the prophecies of the Lord’s birth a temporal specificity (something Alma₂ does not do): he declares that Christ will be born in “five years” (Helaman 14:2).²⁵ It appears, though, that neither Alma₂ nor Samuel has a clear sense of *how and when* he would visit them.²⁶ The argument against continuity through the middle portion of the Book of Mormon largely rests on textual complexity and what Roper calls the “argument from silence.”²⁷

Despite my defense of modified continuity, I can understand objections to the contrary given these problem passages. Because of

24. Here, Jesus seems to suggest that his coming to them was foretold by their prophets (see 3 Nephi 11:12).

25. Among the Nephites, at least initially, the understanding had been that the Lord would come into the world “six hundred years from the time [Lehi₁] left Jerusalem” (see 1 Nephi 10:4; 1 Nephi 19:8; 2 Nephi 25:19). This does not suggest that they knew precisely when he would visit.

26. Mormon later appears to point his reader to the plainest of the early prophecies of Christ’s birth in 3 Nephi 1:1 when he announces: “it was six hundred years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem.” It seems that the Nephites in Alma₂’s (and Samuel’s) day had a clear sense of the time of his birth but were not clear about when and how Jesus would come among them after his resurrection.

27. Roper, “More Perfect Priority,” 363.

Alma₂'s regard for the written word (and the oral teachings of his prophet-fathers), it is admittedly odd that he and others on occasion can seem unaware of or somewhat confused about that which Nephi₁ taught (see the passages just presented).²⁸ There are many passages (some even long stretches of text, as we have seen) where the doctrine of the Lord's coming to the Lehites could be directly alluded to or plainly taught but is not (see Alma 32–34 and Helaman 7–15). Hardy articulates the general position of those belonging to the school of discontinuity. He has observed Alma₂'s and others' seeming confusion or reluctance in the material concerning the coming of the Lord to the Lehites. This is his conclusion:

Although the Book of Mormon contains some three dozen prophecies of Christ's coming, the vast majority concern his life in Palestine — that he would be born, receive baptism, work miracles, be slain for the sins of the world, and then rise from the dead. Only five passages indicate that his ministry would include a post-resurrection visit to the New World. Nephi had spoken plainly on the subject (1 Nephi 12:4–7; 2 Nephi 26:1–9, 32:6),²⁹ *but these prophecies apparently did not have wide distribution*. As late as 83 BC Alma explicitly states that he does not know whether Jesus will come to the Nephites (Alma 7:8), though he later would receive a revelation that this would be the case (Alma 45:10), and Mormon reports that other prophets at the time 'taught that he [Christ] would appear unto them after his resurrection (Alma 16:20).³⁰

The above passages from Nephi₁ (and the others) that Hardy points to are not as plain as they would seem. Each passage suggests that Nephi₁ taught his people that the Lord would visit them in the land of promise. While 1 Nephi 12:4–7 seems to describe a single visit after much destruction, 2 Nephi 26:1–9 (a parallel passage) appears to reference two

28. Matthew Scott Stenson, "Alma's Attempt to Loose Corianton's Mind from Zoramite Chains," *Religious Educator* 21, no. 2 (2020): 139–55.

29. Other revelations/prophecies that refer to the incarnation are clearer (but their sources of origin conflict): see 1 Nephi 10:4; 1 Nephi 19:8; and 2 Nephi 25:19. However, given the teachings of Lehi₁, Nephi₁, and others, the clarity of 2 Nephi 26:1 may not have been sufficient to answer all of Alma₂'s questions.

30. Hardy, *Understanding*, 182, emphasis added. The misreading of Alma 7 is understandable given that the chapter is nuanced and apparently alludes to at least two separate comings of the Lord (perhaps even three): 1) to "his people" and 2) to the Lehites (Alma 7:7–12).

or three separate visits (or seasons) on earth: 1) the “day” when Messiah would undergo “birth ... death ... resurrection” (2 Nephi 26:3); 2) the day when the Messiah would come to the Lehites “after” his resurrection to “show himself” to them and instruct them (2 Nephi 26:1); and 3) a day “that cometh” as a destruction by fire and other natural forces. The last reference to the Lord’s comings to his people says that he will come “in the flesh,” but does not disclose whether he (Jesus) will come in his mortal or resurrected flesh (2 Nephi 32:6). This complexity causes Alma₂, it would seem, to later seek to understand more perfectly about when and where and how these things were to take place. 2 Nephi 26:1 appears to be the *clearest early declaration about the coming of the Lord to them*. It seems that the time of Jesus’s birth was known to the Nephites with some precision, but not the timing of his ministry to them.

Hardy adds:

Some have seen in this disjunction evidence that Joseph Smith was inventing the story as he went along, with Nephi’s predictions being so much clearer because his words were dictated after Third Nephi had already been written. *In any case, there was not a strong expectation of Christ’s coming to the New World on anyone’s part, even after the time of Alma.*³¹

I will address this last statement in the next section of this argument. The claim for discontinuity, as indicated, has been put forth by Metcalfe,³² Roesler,³³ and Hardy. It turns out, though, that Alma₂ seems not so much unaware of or confused about his fathers’ teachings on the subject as that he tends to critically investigate the gaps in Nephite knowledge, and thus struggles for finer understanding of the “mysteries of God” (Alma 12:9–11; see also Alma 40:3). Accordingly, I do not merely attempt to push back against theories of discontinuity, but I suggest that the continuity is less than obvious; and yet I argue with Roper that it is discernibly present and verifiable, even, as Hardy and Roesler admit, relatively plain on occasion (see Alma 16:20 and Alma 45:10). Thus, my position on the question of continuity neither easily aligns with Roper,³⁴ who believes that the continuity of the record is straightforward, nor does it sync well with those who believe in discontinuity.

31. Hardy, *Understanding*, 182, emphasis added. Here Hardy cites Metcalfe, “Priority of Mosiah,” 417–18.

32. Metcalfe, “Priority of Mosiah,” 417–18.

33. Roesler, “Plain and Precious Things,” 87.

34. Roper, “More Perfect Priority.”

Accordingly, scholars have interpreted the absence of the six-hundred-years prophecy from the record after Nephi₁ and passages such as Alma 7:8 to mean that the Nephites did not know that the Lord would visit them at some point in their history. However, I have demonstrated here that this understanding is not as sound as it might be. Indeed, there are many passages as I will demonstrate that establish the idea that the Nephites had a doctrine of visitation to them and that it was taught far and wide from Nephi₁ through Alma₂ and perhaps beyond. This is not to say that the passages involved are not difficult and that the Nephites taught the doctrine frequently and in specific terms. There is no evidence for that sort of claim. What the level of understanding was among those after Alma₂ is less certain.

The Case for Continuity

There is little doubt that Nephi₁ and his successors expected continuity to occur (see Jacob 1:1–3, 8; Jacob 7:27; Jarom 1:1; and 3 Nephi 1:2). There is no definitive evidence that continuity does not hold, and the theories to the contrary are, as yet, not only unsatisfying but also unpersuasive, given the intriguing details of certain passages of scripture such as those we will examine. Indeed, Clifford P. Jones has recently made a convincing case for the strong influence of the small plates' prophecies influencing Mormon's and Moroni's writings. (Roper treats the question of Alma₂'s access to the small plates as a given. That is, he just assumes it.³⁵) Jones makes a good case that the Words of Mormon were not written *after* finding Nephi₁'s small plates but were found *at the beginning* of his work with the Book of Mosiah. Mormon then states, according to Jones, that he plans to use those small plates of Nephi₁ to influence his later editing of the remainder of the record (Mosiah–Mormon 6). After interpreting Words of Mormon 1:3–6, Jones summarizes his findings:

Thus this passage describes the importance of the prophecies on the small plates and tells us that Mormon chose at this time [before his abridgment of the large plates of Nephi₁] to make these prophecies and their fulfillment the main topic for the balance of his abridgment.³⁶

35. Ibid.

36. Clifford P. Jones, "That Which You Have Translated, Which You Have Retained," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 43 (2021): 13, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/that-which-you-have-translated-which-you-have-retained/>.

Accordingly, as might be expected, one can perceive the strong correspondence and unity between the small plates and Alma₂'s nuanced teachings in several places. (Mormon selects for us and comments upon the writings of Alma₂ in his abridgment.) A handful of examples demonstrate the textual and conceptual influence of the small plates of Nephi₁ on Mormon's abridgment of the large plates of Nephi₁ between Mosiah₂ and 3 Nephi:

1. Further, the tree and fruit imagery from Alma 5:33, 62 borrows directly from Lehi₁'s dream and/or Nephi₁'s vision (see 1 Nephi 8 and 15). This connection is rather obvious.
2. Alma₂'s saying in Alma 13:23 that certain truths have been revealed in "plain terms, that we may understand, that we cannot err" seems to borrow from Nephi₁'s declaration in 2 Nephi 25:7 that he intends to prophesy "according to [his] plainness; in the which I know that no man can err."
3. Alma₂'s distinct phrase, "kingdom of the devil" (Alma 5:25 and Alma 41:4), only appears elsewhere in ancient scripture in 1 Nephi 22:22 and 2 Nephi 28:19.
4. Alma₂ seems to borrow from Jacob when he speaks of the Nephites being "wanderers" in a strange land (Alma 13:23; cf. "wanderers" in Jacob 7:26) and refers to "parts of our vineyard" (Alma 13:23; Jacob 5: 13, 14, 19, 38, 39, and 52). Alma₂ also appears to borrow from Jacob (Zenos) in Alma 16:17. Alma₂'s sole use of the rare phrase "true vine" is reminiscent of Nephi₁'s and Jacob's phrases, "true Messiah," "true fold" and "true church and fold" (1 Nephi 10:14; 1 Nephi 15:15; see also 2 Nephi 9:2). Possibly alluding to Nephi₁ or Jacob (Zenos), Samuel the Lamanite uses the similar phrase, "true Shepherd" (Helaman 15:13). It is interesting to notice that Nephi₁'s use of the phrase "true olive-tree" in context the imagery from Zenos's allegory in 1 Nephi 15:12–16 suggests that Samuel's use of "true shepherd" may either be borrowed from Lehi₁, Nephi₁, Jacob, or Zenos. Zenos's allegory of the vineyard also ends with allusive touches of pastoral imagery. Indeed, vineyards and pastures have been mixed in the Book of Mormon's imagery since Nephi₁ (see 1 Nephi 10:12–14; 1 Nephi 15:15–16). Zenos's allegory ends with the "Lord of the vineyard" gathering all things into "one body" or "one fold" (see Jacob 5:68, 70, 74; also Jacob 13:41; 1 Nephi 22:25).

5. Enos's saying that the preaching of the word was necessary, "stirring [his people] up continually," and that "nothing short of these things, and exceedingly great plainness of speech, would keep them from ... destruction" seems to have a parallel in Alma₂ (Enos 1:23). It was Alma₂ who sought to "stir [his people] up in remembrance of their duty ... seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them" (Alma 4:19).
6. Alma 36:22 is an unmistakable borrowing from 1 Nephi 1:8.

Here are additional points of influence within the record (some rather extensive): 1 Nephi 5:17–19 (Alma 37:1–5); 1 Nephi 16:29 (Alma 37:6–7, 41), and Jacob 4:10 (Alma 37:12).³⁷ These points of contact are not exhaustive and could be greatly multiplied. In fact, we will examine a few additional ones later. This sample of examples merely demonstrates that Alma₂ was familiar with Nephi₁'s written words and teachings.

Here are two of the shorter examples from above presented side-by-side for easy access:

Nephi ₁	Alma ₂
And thus we see <i>that by small and simple</i> means the Lord can bring about <i>great things</i> (1 Nephi 16:29)	[B]ut behold I say unto you, <i>that by small and simple things are great things</i> brought to pass; (Alma 37:6; see also Alma 37:7, 41)
For behold, ye yourselves know that <i>he counseleth in wisdom</i> , and in justice, and in great mercy, <i>over all his works</i> (Jacob 4:10).	And it may suffice if only I say they are preserved for a wise purpose, which purpose is known unto God; for <i>he doth counsel in wisdom over all his works</i> , and his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round (Alma 37:12).

37. Both King Benjamin and Alma₂ seem to have received the small plates from those who transmitted the records to them (see Omni 1:25; Words of Mormon 1:10–11; Mosiah 1:2, 6; and Alma 37:1–5). (It is well understood that Mormon and Moroni possessed and often alluded to the small plates.) And, as providence would have it, the small plates, though translated last, seem to be a natural preface to the later purposes of the Book of Mormon. Clifford Jones's detailed article on the Words of Mormon confirms this reading. See Jones, "That Which You Have Translated." Nevertheless, the verbal, syntactic, and conceptual correspondences between Alma₂'s writings and the small plates of Nephi₁ make it unlikely that Alma₂ merely copies from the large plates of Nephi₁ or that he merely inherits broad rhetorical traditions (cultural habits of speech and written expression) that happen to also be expressed in certain specific ways by both Nephi₁ and Alma₂. In any case, in some ways the jury is still out on the question of continuity of transmission because there remain too many unanswered questions about certain passages.

Two of the other phrases in Alma 37:12, also indicate connections to the small plates: “wise purpose,” also found in 1 Nephi 9:5 (discussed further hereafter) and 1 Nephi 19:3, and “one eternal round,” found in 1 Nephi 10:19. Thus, this one verse by Alma₂ makes it fairly clear that Alma₂ is a careful student of the small plates of Nephi₁. In Alma 37:12, we have then a single verse with multiple characteristics and non-biblical phrases that seem to place the claim for Alma₂’s possession of the small plates beyond dispute. In any case, the resonances are complex and intriguing and seem to confirm that Alma₂ had strong familiarity with certain verses in 1 Nephi, or with the small plates of Nephi₁.

To solidify this point, I will demonstrate in addition to these phrasal parallels, Alma₂’s borrowing from Nephi₁ (or perhaps Lehi₁). Indeed, as indicated, Alma 36:22 contains an impressive direct quotation from the small plates (see 1 Nephi 1:8). It is one that is so exact, distinct, and lengthy that it cannot plausibly be attributed to the general tradition. Lehi₁’s words as recorded by Nephi₁ are as follows:

And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he [Lehi₁] was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God. (1 Nephi 1:8)

Alma₂ directly borrows these words from Lehi₁ as he speaks to his son Helaman₂. Alma₂ even connects them to Lehi₁ by saying, “even as our father Lehi saw”:

Yea, *methought* I [Alma₂] saw, even as our father Lehi saw, *God sitting upon his throne, surrounded by numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God*; yea, and my soul did long to be there. (Alma 36:22)

Given the foregoing, it is unlikely that these various intersections (whether exact, as is the last example, or approximate as some are) can all be attributed to a broad rhetorical tradition as some of them are extensive and/or very precise borrowings. It is possible, considering the overlap between Lehi₁’s writings and Nephi₁’s abridgment of his father’s words, that some of what persists in the record can best be attributed to Lehi₁, but what portions of Nephi₁’s extant account to Lehi₁’s writings are not clear. (Ultimately it does not matter how the doctrines were passed down to Alma₂. The point is that Alma₂ had them from his prophet-fathers.) Although Alma₂ could have discovered some of these details on the brass plates in his possession (or among Lehi₁’s preserved writings), it is more

probable that he possessed the small plates of Nephi₁ and was a careful student of them and the other records in his possession. The subject of the transmission of small plates from Nephi₁ to Alma₂ will be examined later in more depth.

Alma 37 further demonstrates Alma₂'s likely possession of the small plates. Moreover, it suggests that the small plates were not just in his possession but were in the possession of (in some sense and in some form) the sons of Mosiah while on their mission to the Lamanites. Alma 37 suggests that Alma₂ desires to transmit to Helaman₂ “the records which have been entrusted with [him],” including the “plates of Nephi [the large plates],” the “plates of brass,” the “twenty-four plates,” and “*all the plates that do contain that which is holy writ*” (Alma 37:1–3, 5, 21). While 1 Nephi 5:17–19 (the small plates record) is strongly alluded to in Alma 37:3–5, the “plates of brass” are *not* what is implied as going forth among the Lamanites in Alma 37:5–12. In Alma 37:5–12, Alma₂ teaches that “by small and simple things are great things brought to pass” (Alma 37:6). As he discusses the power of “holy writ,” he repeats three times the word “small” in phrases such as “small and simple,” “small means,” and “very small means” (Alma 37:6–7; see also 1 Nephi 16:29).³⁸ One wonders if the repetition of the word “small” in these phrases could be a reference to the small plates themselves. Perhaps Alma₂ is considering all plates in his hands as small things. However, it would be particularly natural for him to use that word if he were in possession of what Nephi₁ called the small plates. Without having access to the large plates of Nephi₁ ourselves it is hard to say what spiritual matters were common to both records. However, we do know that the small plates were the more sacred account and were about the ministry and the prophecies, as opposed to the wars, contentions, and reigns of the kings (see 1 Nephi 1–6; 1 Nephi 19:1–5).

Furthermore, Alma₂ reports that without “these records” that have been kept, “Ammon and his brethren could not have convinced so many of the Lamanites of the incorrect traditions of *their fathers*” (Alma 37:9). These records — presumably the small *and* large plates of Nephi — brought the Lamanites to a correct knowledge of their first fathers and a “*knowledge of their Redeemer*” (Alma 37:9–10). Even if this material came from the large plates of Nephi₁ it demonstrates that some important spiritual matters were also found on those plates. In that case,

38. It is of note that Nephi₁ uses this phrase to refer to the Liahona: “And thus we see that by small means the Lord can bring about great things” (1 Nephi 16:29). Further, “simple” (or “simpleness”) is a word that Nephi₁ associates with his record (see 2 Nephi 3:20).

Alma₂ could have learned of the Redeemer’s coming to them from those plates. What is more plausible, though, is that he has all the records that have been vouchsafed from the earlier prophets, especially those that are most sacred. These records (he is not speaking of the brass plates in Alma 37:9) had convinced many Lamanites of the “error of their ways” and brought them to lament their actions against their Nephite brethren. Alma₂ suggests that “these things” are preserved “for a wise purpose in him [God]” (Alma 37:2, 12, 14). This phrase — “for a wise purpose in him” — is associated with the small plates as early as 1 Nephi 9:5–6 and is never used by anyone else besides Alma₂. This same phrase — “wise purpose” — can also be found in the Words of Mormon (Words of Mormon 1:7). Given the possibility that Mormon had the small plates before his abridgment of the large plates,³⁹ he may have borrowed that phrase from Nephi₁ as Alma₂ apparently does (see 1 Nephi 9:5 and 1 Nephi 19:3).

The resemblance between Nephi₁’s and Alma₂’s writings suggests that Alma₂ may well be influenced by Nephi₁ due to his possession of the small plates.⁴⁰ Below, we see Alma₂ borrowing Nephi₁’s distinct small-plates’ phrase, “for a wise purpose in him” as well as teaching that the fathers received a promise from the Lord concerning the transmission of the small plates.

Nephi ₁	Alma ₂
Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me [Nephi ₁] to make these plates <i>for a wise purpose in him</i> , which purpose I know not. But the Lord knoweth all things from the beginning; wherefore, he prepareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men; for behold, <i>he hath all power unto the fulfilling of all his words</i> . And thus it is. Amen (1 Nephi 9:5–6).	But if ye [Helaman ₂] keep the commandments of God, and do with these things which are sacred according to that which the Lord doth command you ... behold, no power of earth or hell can take them from you, <i>for God is powerful to the fulfilling of all his words</i> . For he will fulfill all his promises which he has made unto you, for he has fulfilled his promises which he has made unto our fathers. For he promised unto them that he would preserve these things <i>for a wise purpose in him</i> , that he might show forth his power unto future generations (Alma 37:16–17).

This material seems to establish that Alma₂ was in possession of the small plates of Nephi₁ and thus was aware of the prophecies concerning

39. Jones, “That Which You Have Translated.”

40. The same language may have originated with Lehi₁’s account or the large plates of Nephi₁, but that is beside the point: Here, I seek to establish that Alma₂ had access to his fathers’ prophecies and teachings, regardless of how they came down to him.

the coming of the Lord to the Jews and to them, if not also aware of his coming to others. The textual, conceptual, and doctrinal continuity is difficult to explain away despite its irregularity. And yet, the transmission of certain essential Nephite doctrines is not straightforward. That is why the positive passages confirming the transfer of former fundamental truths are so exciting to discover in Mormon's account.

Accordingly, consider the following excerpts from Alma₂'s teachings about the time of his great sermon to the church recorded in Alma 5 (the time of the ministry of his friends among the Lamanites). Alma 16 recounts the desolation of the Ammonihahites shortly after Alma₂ and Amulek preached unto them as part of Alma₂'s regulatory tour of the Nephite lands and church, a tour that commenced in Zarahemla (Alma 5:1).⁴¹ Here, notice Alma₂'s firm grasp of the doctrine of the Lord's coming to the Jews and how it is coupled with the doctrine that Christ would come to his own people (Lehites), yet nothing is said about the precise time and place of that event. Also, notice how widely the doctrine of Christ's coming to the Lehites was taught among the Nephites according to this passage:

And Alma and Amulek went forth preaching repentance. ...

And thus did Alma and Amulek go forth, and also many more who had been chosen for the work, to preach the word *throughout all the land*. And the establishment of the church became general *throughout the land, in all the region round about, among all the people of the Nephites*.

And there was no inequality among them [as to having access to the truth]; the Lord did pour out his Spirit on all the face of the land to *prepare the minds of the children of men, or to prepare their hearts to receive the word which should be taught among them at the time of his coming*. ...⁴²

Holding forth things which must shortly come; yea, holding forth the coming of the Son of God, his sufferings and death, and also the resurrection of the dead.⁴³

41. Even though it is a couple years after the preaching that Alma₂ does in all the land, Alma 16 seems to represent Alma₂'s and the church's basic understanding of the Lord's coming(s) to the earth, and thus acts as the general background for the mission recounted in Alma 5–16.

42. This same language will be important later when we look at Alma 39:15–16.

43. These events would occur in the Old World.

And many people did inquire concerning the place where the Son of God should come; and they were taught that he would appear unto them after his resurrection; and this the people did hear with great joy and gladness. (Alma 16:13–20; see also Helaman 16:5)⁴⁴

Significantly, this relatively plain passage concludes the block of chapters that commence in Alma 5:1 and ends in Alma 16:21. From these verses,⁴⁵ we learn that Alma₂ was not alone in his knowledge that Christ would come not only to the Jews in and around Jerusalem but in his knowledge that “*after* his [Lord’s] resurrection” Jesus would come among the Lehites. However, we also learn from these verses that “many people” had questions “concerning the *place* where the Son of God should come.” We are told that the Nephites knew his visit would occur sometime “*after*” Jesus’s resurrection, but there is no sense that the people of the Nephite church had a clear understanding of the exact time and place of his coming. I would further suggest that Alma₂ (if not his people too) had some sense that the coming of the Lord would also have a semi-universal aspect. At least, Alma₂ seems to teach this in both Alma 5 and Alma 13, as we shall explain in a later section of this paper. In short, the case is compelling for continuity through at least Alma₂’s writings, even if there are still open questions for Alma₂ and his people and for scholars interested in the question of continuity.

Considering the arguments for discontinuity described earlier and the ways in which Alma 5 receives little attention elsewhere in regard to this specific question about Alma₂’s awareness of the coming of the Lord to his people, it may be of some value to revisit Alma₂’s general writings

44. Later statements that seem to reverse this fairly clear distinction, such as that material found in Helaman 16, actually do not do so. In Samuel the Lamanite’s sermon to Zarahemla, he assumes this knowledge and concentrates on the Nephite destruction four hundred years after the coming of Christ to them. Why such knowledge would motivate the wicked in his day is not clear. It is interesting to find strong resonances with Samuel’s teachings in Alma 5, 13, and 16 (see Helaman 14:9, 18; also Helaman 16:4–5, 13–14). Because that the unbelievers, according to Mormon, are “spreading rumors” about the coming of the Lord does not disqualify what the believers apparently knew and understood (Helaman 16:22). Hence, Mormon calls the rumors “foolish and vain” (Helaman 16:22). Lastly, it is no small thing that Mormon begins 3 Nephi emphasizing “those [advent] traditions” found to profusion in the prophecies of the holy prophets (3 Nephi 1:9).

45. An original heading and a narrative transition from Alma₂’s regulatory travels to his friends’ mission to the Lamanites clearly brackets this block of unified material.

with a careful eye focusing on this somewhat elusive doctrine.⁴⁶ That is, in addition to the above discussion of Alma 16:13–20, I particularly wish to concentrate this exegetical effort on Alma 5, but, as mentioned, I will take an interest in many of the other words of Alma₂ where he appears to less discernibly address this subject, including Alma 7, 13, and 39.⁴⁷ In what follows, it will be argued that in Zarahemla (and in other places such as Gideon and Ammonihah) Alma₂ underscores the urgent need of repentance among his people because the Lord is to make a visit to them to establish his kingdom among them (as he will do among others elsewhere). This event that for our purposes constitutes part of the Lord’s first coming to earth, Alma₂ insists, is according to his fathers’ prophecies and is what he has “fasted and prayed for many days that [he] might know of [him]self” (Alma 5:46).⁴⁸

In addition to applying close reading strategies, the method to be followed to demonstrate this assertion, as we have seen already, is also intratextual or, we might say, comparative.⁴⁹ In general, after reviewing

46. Richard Dilworth Rust has examined Alma₂’s sermon at Zarahemla from a literary and rhetorical standpoint, noting Alma₂’s “impassioned personal style” and extensive use of the “rhetorical question.” Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 119, 121. Robert A. Rees has analyzed the sermon similarly. Rees, “Alma the Younger’s Sermon,” 332. Daniel Belnap has used Alma 5 to demonstrate that later Nephites borrowed from the narrative elements of Lehi’s dream. Daniel L. Belnap, “Even as Our Father Lehi Saw’: Lehi’s Dream as Nephite Cultural Narrative,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT, and Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2011), 224.

47. In contrast to Hardy’s understanding of the text is Matthew Roper’s argument for continuity. He explicitly refers to this search in Alma 5. Roper, “More Perfect Priority.”

48. It is possible that in John 10:16 Jesus alludes to an earlier text without saying so since Alma₂ seems to draw on a source from the brass plates to connect his advent prophecies to the “good shepherd” (see Alma 5:37–60). The prophet Ezekiel associated with the Old Testament could not have been Alma₂’s direct source for this imagery since Ezekiel was a prophet of the Babylonian exile. We also know that Alma₁ had sought to regulate the church before his son attempted it, and in doing so, he used similar pastoral imagery as that employed by Ezekiel. However, Alma₁’s pastoral teachings appear to have been received by direct revelation (see Mosiah 26:20–36). Thus, Alma₂ may draw his pastoral imagery in Alma 5 from the brass plates or from his own father’s revelatory experience (or some combination of them).

49. This term has now been used, defined, and demonstrated by many Latter-day Saint scholars, so it does not seem necessary here to discuss it at great length.

Alma₂'s relationship to the Nephite church and the earliest Nephite prophecies concerning the comings of the Lord to the earth, we will conduct a limited analysis of Alma₂'s preaching in Gideon (Alma 7), his preaching in Ammonihah (Alma 13), and his counsel to Corianton in Zarahemla (Alma 39). Then, it will be possible to perform an alternative reading of Alma 5 in context with some of its later appropriations by Mormon in Helaman 16 and 3 Nephi 8–10. Mormon appears to allude to Alma 5 when he discusses both the Lord's coming to the Jews and his coming to the Lehites. I will conclude the project with a restatement of the findings and some parting observations.

The Early Nephite Church

The Nephite church is established (or reformed) by Alma₂'s father, a former priest of King Noah. After the prophet Abinadi finished his message and sealed his testimony with his life, Alma₁ fled Noah's court and recorded Abinadi's inspired remarks. Alma₁ gathered a congregation at the waters of Mormon and later led the church in Zarahemla and throughout the land (see Mosiah 18:30; also Mosiah 25:15–24). However, sometime after that, dissension erupted in the church “among the brethren” and some of the young and vulnerable in society became “unbelievers” (Mosiah 26:5; 27:1). In addition, some who had been “little children” at the time of King Benjamin's final sermon, “could not understand the words of King Benjamin,” and thus would not agree to be baptized, even though their parents presumably had been.⁵⁰ “[B]ecause of their disbelief the unbelievers could not understand the word of God” spoken by King Benjamin concerning the resurrection and the coming of Christ,” nor would they “call upon the Lord their God” for greater understanding of these truths (Mosiah 26:1–4). The unbelief and dissension in this time period of Nephite society and church history constitutes yet another departure from the “tradition of their fathers,” a tradition that is later described as foolish, vain, and silly (see Mosiah 26:1–5; Alma 30:6, 12–15,

Intertextuality refers to the literary phenomenon wherein one text alludes to an earlier text, thus by perceived association creating an interpretive conversation between the two of them. Intratextuality simply means that this interpretive conversation (or textual interplay between texts) occurs within a single collection of texts.

50. The sermon may be termed sermons as it has been divided into three parts by James E. Faulconer, *Mosiah: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2020), 15, 116. In this paper the sermons will be treated as one block or as one sermon.

31). One of those who apparently departed from the church during this season because of the persuasions of dissenters was Alma₂.⁵¹

It is in this tumultuous environment that Alma₂ and four of the sons of Mosiah traveled about the land seeking to “destroy the church of God.”⁵² Alma₂ is described in the record as being a “man of many words” who had become “very wicked and idolatrous” (Mosiah 27:8–10). Alma₂’s father and the people of the church were so concerned about the “rising generation” and their general dissension from the church over the doctrines of the resurrection and the coming of Christ that they fasted and prayed that Alma₂ and the others might “come to a knowledge of the truth” of these established/traditional teachings. In response to the faith exercised by the people of the church concerning the unbelievers, Alma₂ and his friends were visited by an angel who rebuked them with a “voice of thunder” that “caused the earth to shake upon which they stood” (Mosiah 27:11–16). The angel sent from God commanded Alma₂ to “seek to destroy the church no more” (27:17). The shock of the angelic visitation caused him to become mute and paralyzed. However, with additional fasting and prayer, after three days Alma₂ was delivered from his state of unbelief and paralysis. It is what follows next that will be of most interest to us as we proceed. For, once delivered from his disabled condition, Alma₂ stood and spoke with passion to those assembled.

Alma₂’s spontaneous utterance on this occasion contains the seeds of much of what he taught and did himself later as head of the church in Zarahemla, Gideon, Ammonihah, and elsewhere. That is why I take the time to briefly rehearse this familiar story. On this occasion, Alma₂ reported to his father and his priests that he had during the three days repented of his sins and had been born again and that the Lord, significantly, had taught him that he intended these blessings to be made available unto all who desire to “inherit the kingdom of God” (Mosiah 27:24–26). Aside from this expansion of Alma₂’s perspective on the work of the Lord, in the midst of his confession, *we learn that he had been one of those in the church who had “rejected [the] Redeemer and denied that which had been spoken of by our fathers” concerning the Lord’s coming* (Mosiah 27:30). Due to what Alma₂ appears to have

51. Faulconer, *Mosiah*, 16. Faulconer writes that in Mosiah 27 “many younger members of the church fall into apostasy, including the sons of Alma₁ and Mosiah₂.”

52. Robert A. Rees sees these events differently than they have been characterized here. He sees Alma₁ as “rescuing the church” and conducting a “reformation” of it. Moreover, he says that Alma₂ was “blessed to come of age during a period of peace and stability.” Rees, “Alma the Younger’s Sermon,” 331.

learned during his angelic encounter and ordeal, he begins to see that in some sense the Lord will “remember every creature of his creating” that “he will make himself manifest unto all” (Mosiah 27:30).⁵³ This occasion seems to be paradigm shifting for Alma₂ and causes him to search the prophecies and ask new questions about associated doctrines as found in the writings of his prophet-fathers.

During this period, Alma₂ seems to have spent time seriously examining the prophecies and considering anew the questions of the resurrection and the coming of the Lord. The record says that he and his royal friends went about “explaining the prophecies and scriptures to all who desired to hear them.” They did “bring . . . many to the knowledge of the truth, yea, to a knowledge of their Redeemer” and the “good tidings” of his coming to establish his kingdom on earth (Mosiah 27:35–37).⁵⁴ During this time of repentance, development, and maturation, Alma₂ would have presumably pondered the prophecies and reflected on the teachings of the fathers concerning the resurrection and the coming(s) of the Lord to the earth. To lay a foundation to discuss Alma₂’s teachings, it would be helpful to review the prophetic tradition and writings to which he would have had access. It should be remembered in all of this that the church was struggling with dissenters over just these subjects in the time that Alma₂ was touring the land “confirming [his] faith” as well as “explaining the prophecies and the scriptures” (Mosiah 27:33, 35).

The Fathers on the Coming(s) of Christ

As we have seen, the Book of Mormon represents the coming of Christ in something of a complicated way, giving different emphases at different

53. At this time, Alma₂ learns that “every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess before him . . . at the last day” that “he is God” (Mosiah 27:31). Thereafter, and because he and the sons of Mosiah₂ had done so much damage in all the land, they traveled about, “zealously striving to repair all the injuries which they had done to the church, confessing all their sins, and publishing all the things which they had seen” (Mosiah 27:35). From the time of his conversion, Alma₂ embraces the traditional doctrines of his fathers and begins to think broadly about the availability and reach of salvation.

54. When one encounters the phrase “good tidings” or its equivalent in scripture, “glad tidings,” it commonly refers to the coming of the Lord in some sense to the earth. This is because his coming to earth is necessary to his atoning in the flesh for the sins of humankind. The blessings of that vicarious sacrifice are unto all people. That phrase — good tidings — also relates to the Lord’s (and the angels’ and his servants’) ministering salvation to others after his great ordeals are accomplished, thus the Lord declares glad tidings to those in the spirit world and in the Americas, etc. (see Isaiah 52:7; Luke 2:10; Helaman 13:7).

moments. It is probably best to refer to the *comings* of the Lord instead of the *coming* of the Lord.⁵⁵ Here, it will be argued that Lehi₁ and Nephi₁ and others such as Jacob, Enos, Abinadi, and King Benjamin addressed the subject of the coming of the Lord. However, it will be demonstrated that the Lord's coming was not just to the Jews in Jerusalem in the first century AD. Instead, at this stage we will be most interested in Alma₂'s fathers' predictions about the Lord's coming to the Lehites (and others) since that will allow us to understand Alma₂'s prophecies and teachings better when the time comes to examine his sermons at Zarahemla, Gideon, and Ammonihah. I will reserve my discussion of Zeno's prophecy in 1 Nephi 19:10–11 until a later section and limit myself here to the apparent line of transmission between Lehi₁ and King Benjamin. Later, I will also make a few more comments about Samuel the Lamanite's words and Mormon's use of Alma₂'s writings.

Lehi₁'s Teachings

To begin, Lehi₁ declared the coming of the Lord after seeing visions and receiving a book of prophecy (see 1 Nephi 1:19). And yet, as mentioned, there seems to be some ambiguity in what we later learn from the Nephite record about this subject. Before he escaped Jerusalem with his family, Nephi₁ records that Lehi₁ learned from a book of prophecy delivered to him about the destruction of the “great city Jerusalem” and about a book that “manifested plainly of the coming of a Messiah” (1 Nephi 1:4, 12–13, 19). Nephi₁ writes that Lehi₁ went forth to bear witness of those things to come that “he had both seen and heard,” but that he was rejected by the Jews (1 Nephi 1:18–19). Later, Nephi₁ chronicles for us Lehi₁'s further teachings concerning the Messiah who should come unto the Jews. As indicated, he recounts that Lehi₁ prophesied that the Messiah or “Savior of the world” should come “six hundred years from the time that [he] left Jerusalem.” Moreover, Lehi₁ said that the way would be prepared before him (the Messiah) by a “prophet.” This Messiah or Redeemer, according to Lehi₁, would preach his gospel “among the Jews” and “rise from the dead, and should make himself manifest, by the Holy Ghost, unto the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 10:3–11). In expounding his father's “many great words” to his brothers, Nephi₁ explains that “many generations after the Messiah shall be manifested in body unto the children of men,” his father's seed would be blessed through the “fulness of the gospel”

55. This corresponds to our understanding of the coming of the Lord in our day. We know that the Lord will make several appearances to the earth when he comes again (see D&C 133:20).

received by the Gentiles (1 Nephi 15:3, 13). Lehi₁'s seed would again “come to a knowledge of their forefathers, and also to a knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer, which was ministered unto their fathers by him” (1 Nephi 15:14). This new “knowledge of their Redeemer” would be instrumental in gathering them in a latter day into the “true fold of God” or unto the “true olive tree” (1 Nephi 15:14–16). Nephi₁ then describes for us those things that he himself saw in apocalyptic vision concerning the Lord’s coming to the Jews and Gentiles as well as his coming to Lehi₁'s seed (see 1 Nephi 11–14).

Accordingly, in the simplest of terms the Nephite fathers had a basic two-fold understanding of coming of the Lord (It will be expanded into a four-fold doctrine later). This understanding appears to surface from time to time in the middle part of the Book of Mormon, suggesting that there was doctrinal continuity on this subject at least from Lehi₁ to Alma₂. Here are two comings that Lehi₁ and Nephi₁ appear to speak of the most (and this is their order of importance):

1. The Lord’s coming to the Jews in Jerusalem when he would teach his gospel, suffer, die, and be raised up (1 Nephi 10:3–11; 1 Nephi 15:13). Strictly speaking, Nephi₁ says that he spoke of the Lord’s coming “in body unto the children of men.” That last phrase may have wider application than just pointing to his life and ministry among the Jews.
2. The Lord’s coming to the Lehites when he would “minister unto their fathers” (1 Nephi 15:14).

To these fundamental doctrines might be added the Lord’s visiting the Gentiles by the Holy Ghost and the fulness of the gospel in a latter day before his Second Coming. The Nephite fathers were aware of these doctrines as well. What there does not appear to be strong evidence for before about 1 Nephi 19:10–11 is the Lord’s intent, according to Zeno’s prophecy, to visit the remnants of the house of Israel about the time of his death when the sign of darkness is given to those on the isles of the sea who are of the house of Israel.

Nephi₁'s Teachings

In Nephi₁'s vision spanning much of what would become modern history,⁵⁶ we learn that the Messiah would, as Lehi₁ indicated, come

56. Matthew Scott Stenson, “Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision: Apocalyptic Revelations in Narrative Context,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2012): 155–79, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol51/iss4/13/>. In this article, it is argued in

among his own people, the Jews (1 Nephi 11:27). The “Redeemer of the world” would again be preceded by the “prophet who should prepare the way before him” (1 Nephi 11:27). This Messiah, now referred to as the “Lamb of God,” would be baptized and “minister unto the people, in power and great glory” (1 Nephi 11:27–28, 31).⁵⁷ He would be “lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world” (1 Nephi 11:33). Nephi₁’s vision, however, not only describes the Messiah’s ministry among the Jews in Palestine but, as Nephi₁ will now record, it demonstrates that his first coming (or first comings) would include a visit to the New World. In fact, early on in his vision Nephi₁ is exhorted to watch for the special event as it is the centerpiece of his vision (see 1 Nephi 11:7). Subsequently, Nephi₁ records seeing destruction and the sign of darkness among his seed and then says,

And it came to pass that after I saw these things, I saw the vapor of darkness, that it passed from off the face of the earth; and behold, I saw multitudes who had not fallen because of the great and terrible judgments of the Lord.

And I saw the heavens open, and the Lamb of God descending out of heaven; and he came down and showed himself unto them. (1 Nephi 12:5–6)

This appearance of the Messiah/Lamb among the seed of Lehi₁ from this point on becomes an important part of Nephite teaching and prophetic tradition, one that Alma₂ will be conscious of, and as mentioned, teach widely along with others of the Nephite church. Later in Nephi₁’s vision, we learn that this messianic visitation and ministry among the Lehites would be recorded when it occurred and would yet play an important role, along with “other books,” in a future day of redemption that would begin with the “Gentiles” (1 Nephi 13:39–42). This anticipated ministry of the Messiah among his father’s seed is entertained again by Nephi₁ at some length in his final prophecy (see 2 Nephi 26:3–9).⁵⁸ There, as before,

part that Lehi₁’s dream may represent for Nephi₁ a dualism between Zion (tree) and Babylon (building). The early Nephite revelations are examined in light of apocalyptic literature.

57. The phrase “in power and great glory” seems more reminiscent of the Second Coming than the first. However, the first coming of the Lord is also often described in these terms, as we shall see.

58. Christ’s coming to the Lehites is clearly alluded to elsewhere such as in 1 Nephi 15:14. It is noteworthy that this reference is found in immediate context with what appears to be the first coming of Christ to the Jews and the restoration of the gospel in a latter day (see 1 Nephi 15:13). This reference to the Lord’s coming

we witness the destruction and works of darkness among Lehi₁'s seed, and then we are told that after the Lord's "death and resurrection" the "Son of Righteousness [Messiah] shall appear [unto Lehi₁'s seed] with healing in his wings" (2 Nephi 26:9). Nephi₁ ends his overall account exhorting us to respect the words, "which shall proceed forth from the mouth of the Lamb of God [at the time of his coming]," by which he means the words of the resurrected Messiah, who will come sometime after his resurrection in some undisclosed way among his father's seed in a future generation many centuries hence (2 Nephi 33:14).⁵⁹ Alma₂ inherits all this as the prophetic tradition transmitted by the fathers.⁶⁰

Jacob's Teachings

Jacob, Nephi₁'s brother, also has a complicated but largely consistent view of the comings of the Lord. He and his people had "searched much" and were very interested in "things to come" (see 2 Nephi 9:4). Due to their "faith and great anxiety" (Jacob 1:5), they had "many revelations, and the spirit of much prophecy" (Jacob 1:6). For instance, in 2 Nephi 6–10, Jacob, borrowing heavily from his brother's teachings (and Isaiah), provides his reader three variations on the coming of the Lord.

1. Jacob speaks of the Lord's coming among the Jews (see 2 Nephi 6:9; 2 Nephi 9:4–5, 21; also 2 Nephi 10:3–6).
2. Jacob speaks of the Lord's manifesting himself to the Gentiles (and through them to others) — "set[ting] his hand again the second time" — (2 Nephi 6:14; see also 2 Nephi 10:8–19; 21:11 and Jacob 6:2).⁶¹ (Lehi₁ and Nephi₁ had dwelt on this subject.)

among the Lehites is also found here in context with imagery from Zenos's allegory and the sheepfold of the Good Shepherd (see 1 Nephi 15:12–16). This will have relevancy later.

59. I have not attempted to review all passages where Nephi₁ speaks of the coming of the Lord to the Jews and the Lehites. For instance, for another example of these comings as taught by Nephi₁ (they are often taught in tandem) one may also consult 1 Nephi 19:8–14.

60. It should also be pointed out that Jacob (Israel), Zenos, and Zenock were all fathers to the seed of Lehi₁ and spoke of the coming of the Messiah among the Jews in the first century and, at least in one case, of his ministry among the seed of Lehi₁: "For thus spake the prophet [Zenos]: The Lord God surely shall visit all the house of Israel at that day, some with his voice..." (1 Nephi 19:10–12).

61. In a sense, this is a kind of coming of the Lord, but not in person. It has reference to his work of restoration and gathering coming forth in a latter-day (Nephi₁ referred to a similar [not exact] idea when reciting his father's prophecy at

3. Jacob speaks of the Lord's Second Coming as a divine warrior to deliver his covenant people (see 2 Nephi 6:13–14, 17).⁶² Nephi₁ had also spoken of this coming) 1 Nephi 22:24–28). Notably, Nephi₁ also understands the Messiah's Second Coming to be preceded by a grafting in of all persons who would hear his voice into the fold of the Good Shepherd (1 Nephi 13:41; 1 Nephi 22:25).

To these three concepts of the coming of the Lord found in Jacob's teachings, may be added a fourth that also originated with Nephi₁ (Zenos):

4. Although it is more speculative, if Jacob is not speaking of the Lord's coming to the Jews, he *may* speak of the Lord's coming among the Lehites (see Jacob 1:5–7; or, if not that, he *may* here speak of the kingdom that is to be established by the latter-day Gentiles as referred to in Jacob 5:61–76).⁶³ Nephi₁ calls this kingdom Zion and the Church of the Lamb.

This last observation may need a little explanation. Understanding Jacob's reference to the "kingdom, which should come" in Jacob 1:6 depends on what is alluded to in Jacob 1:5. If verse 5 refers to the judgments of the Lord as described in 3 Nephi 8–10 (judgment is a type of visitation; see 2 Nephi 1:12, 18), then verse 6 may refer to the kingdom established at the Lord's coming to the Lehites. But if verse 5, as is likely, refers to the Nephites' eventual annihilation four hundred years after the Lord's coming to the Jews (a theme of great interest to Nephi₁, Alma₂, Nephi₂, and Samuel the Lamanite), then the kingdom referred to is that

1 Nephi 10:11). The Lord "shall manifest himself unto [the Gentiles]" in the latter day in power by means of a book(s) to come forth (see 1 Nephi 14:1). The divine work it ushers in prepares the way for the Lord's actual Second Coming. The Lord makes himself "manifest" to the Gentiles by the power of the Holy Ghost both in the first century and again in the latter-day. The Gentiles, unlike the house of Israel, do not have the promise to hear the Lord's word or voice and see him collectively before his Second Coming, as did the remnants of the house of Israel (see 1 Nephi 19:11; also 3 Nephi 15:23).

62. Nephi₁ sets up this discussion in 1 Nephi when he reads to his brothers Isaiah 49 as recounted in 1 Nephi 21 and then teaches them about the covenant people's deliverance by the divine warrior in 1 Nephi 22.

63. This may also be a reference to the Lord's coming to the Jews. That Jacob says 'we did labor among our people' may signal that he understands that he is preparing a people for more than redemption in the abstract but may in fact suggest that he is aware of the coming of the Lord to his people as was Nephi₁.

restored in a latter day. Jacob 1:7's connection to Jacob and his ministry "among [his] people" seems to suggest that he could have in mind the prophecies of his brother about the Lord's coming to the Lehites. It likely does not refer to the kingdom that was set up among the first-century Jews (and Gentiles) given its specifically Nephite context in verse 5. The imagery in Jacob 1:7 alludes to Moses's attempt to introduce his people to the Lord's presence amidst "great fire" and "thick darkness" when they were encamped at the foot of Sinai (Deuteronomy 5:22–28). They feared and were not able to enter into the Lord's rest (see Alma 16:16–17). In 3 Nephi, as some have noted, the account, much as in Matthew's gospel, represents the Lord as a "New Moses" delivering the higher law to his people from a holy place.⁶⁴ Accordingly, it is unclear what "kingdom," Jacob refers to in Jacob 1:7, but the imagery from verse 7 may apply to the events of 3 Nephi at Bountiful. It is true that later in Jacob 4 Jacob's focus is on the Lord's coming to the Jews to make atonement/resurrection and in Jacob 5 his focus is on the coming of the kingdom of God (or church of God) in the last days before the final burning.

Nephi₁ sums up Jacob's teachings in 2 Nephi 6–10 in 2 Nephi 11 by referring to at least two of the comings of the Lord: the Lord's coming to the Jews (see 2 Nephi 11:4, 6–7); and the Lord's latter-day "coming" to the Gentiles (see 2 Nephi 11:5). The foregoing list (of items 1–4 above) is provided to demonstrate that Jacob, like Lehi₁ and Nephi₁, has a sophisticated understanding of the Lord's coming.⁶⁵

Enos's Teachings

Enos also appears to allude to the coming of the Lord to the Jews and to the Lehites in his record. "[A] voice" to his mind whispers that because

64. The ideas of Jesus as the New Moses and delivering a second law are commonly referred to by scholars. Andrew C. Skinner, "Israel's Ancient Psalms," *The Sermon on the Mount in Latter-day Saint Scripture*, ed. Gaye Strathearn, Thomas A. Wayment, and Daniel L. Belnap (Provo, UT, and Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2010), 61–62. John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount: A Latter-day Saint Approach* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1990): 7, 18–19.

65. One of Jacob's phrases in reference to the Lord's coming is that they had a "hope of his glory" (Jacob 4:4), and its companion phrase, his people had a "hope of glory in him," (Jacob 4:11). The first phrase suggests the coming of the Lord to the Jews to perform his atonement for all of humankind; the second phrase seems to point to the Nephite believers' anticipated but conditional assurance of their final inheritance in the kingdom of heaven.

of his “faith in Christ, whom he has never before seen or heard,” his sins are forgiven (Enos 1:5, 8). He is told that “many years pass away before he [the Lord] shall manifest himself in the flesh” (Enos 1:8). This appears to refer to the Lord’s coming to offer himself a sacrifice in the Old World. The word “flesh” most often refers to mortality. However, “these words” cause Enos to consider his own people’s situation broken off and in a land far away from those redemptive events to come. Thus, Enos “struggle[s] in the spirit” to lay hold of a blessing for his own people. Again, his account says the “voice of the Lord came into his mind” (Enos 1:10). In language reminiscent of the original covenant made to Lehi₁ and Nephi₁ (see 1 Nephi 2:20–21), Enos is told that “I will visit thy brethren according to their diligence in keeping my commandments” (Enos 1:10). Then the Lord adds this in some contrast to what he has already said: “I have given unto them *this land*, and *it* [also] is a holy land” (Enos 1:10). He concludes, “wherefore, I will visit *thy* brethren, according as I have said” (Enos 1:10). That the Lord here may refer to his visit to them in a future day seems at least possible given Enos’s response to this targeted promise: “And after I, Enos, had heard these words, my faith began to be unshaken in the Lord” (Enos 1:11). It is no surprise that the rest of Enos’s days were spent “among the people of Nephi₁, prophesying of things to come, and testifying of the things which I [he, not unlike Nephi₁ and Jacob] had heard and seen” (Enos 1:19, 26).

Abinadi’s and King Benjamin’s Teachings

After Enos, the spirit of prophecy was enjoyed by many others and the records were handed down from one prophet to another (Jarom 1:4; Omni 1:13).⁶⁶ To these early Nephite teachings might be added those of

66. It should not be seen as a paucity in the spirit of revelation or in the chain of transmission when figures such as Jarom or Abinadom say that they do not have anything to add or that they do not know of other “revelation save that which has been written” (Jarom 1:2; Omni 1:11). It seems that writers after Enos were faithful in transmitting the small plates record but that they had little time to dwell on spiritual matters because of their relentless enemies. Survival was their greater concern. In any case, it is clear that the small plates and the spirit of revelation at least among the most faithful Nephites reaches Mosiah₂’s day, Mosiah₂ the seer and father of King Benjamin. The records of the prophets and the kings come together into his hands and from him they are passed to Mormon (Omni 1:25; Words of Mormon 1:10–11). If the small plates are lost among the records for a time that seems to appear between the time of Jesus’s coming to the Lehiters and Mormon’s discovery of them among those records that had been transmitted to him (Words of Mormon 1:3).

Abinadi and King Benjamin, each of whom had much to say about the coming of the Lord, his resurrection, and his ascension. It is Abinadi who says that Moses and all of the holy prophets spoke of his coming to his people. Abinadi taught that “God himself should come down among the children of men, and take upon him the form of a man, and go forth in mighty power *upon the face of the earth*” (Mosiah 13:33–35).⁶⁷ It was also this prophet who used Isaiah 53 from the brass plates to apparently point to others outside the known fold who were yet to be counted among the Lord’s seed. Abinadi recounts that Isaiah said that “when⁶⁸ thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin he [the Lord] shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days” (Mosiah 14:10).⁶⁹ In this way, the messianic servant referred to by Isaiah would have opportunity to “justify many” (Mosiah 14:11). Christ’s seed, according to Abinadi, would include “all those [past, present, and future] who have hearkened unto the words” of the holy prophets (Mosiah 15:11).⁷⁰ The Lord would go and see the righteous spirits of the dead and organize the work of gathering among them.⁷¹ Further, his personal ministry as the Good Shepherd would even include those not among his flock in the Old World, as we learn in 3 Nephi 15:16–16:3 and John 10:16–18. Alma₂ presumably has a portion of this (Lehi₁’s, Nephi₁’s, Jacob’s, and Abinadi’s teachings) in his mind when he testifies in Zarahemla about the coming of the Lord (Alma₂ repeatedly calls him the “good shepherd,” as indicated), for, as we will

67. The phrase “take upon him the form of a man” seems to qualify the inclusive phrases, “among the children of men” and “upon the face of the earth.” It is easy to see how one might consider this language a fusion of the Lord’s coming to the Jews and his other appearances to those elsewhere on the earth.

68. Can we not interpret the word “when” to mean, “at about the same time as?”

69. One wonders if the phrase, “he shall prolong his days,” cannot be rendered, “he shall have his ministry extended after his resurrection.” If this is sound, then it is obvious how the work of God might “prosper” despite the Lord’s recent rejection by the Jews in the Old World.

70. Abinadi teaches that “ever since the world began” there have been prophets declaring the coming of the Lord among humankind. He exclaims, “And O how beautiful upon the mountains were their feet” (Mosiah 15:13, 15). According to the angel who spoke with King Benjamin, the prophets before Moses had been in some sense among “all the children of men, to declare [Christ’s coming] to every kindred, nation, and tongue” (Mosiah 3:13).

71. Elder Bruce R. McConkie understood this as referring to the Lord’s visit to the spirits of the dead between the laying down of his body and the taking of it up again. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 359–63.

see, he appears to have more than his own people in mind when he alludes to the Lord's post-resurrection ministry in Alma 5 and 13.

Further, it is King Benjamin who teaches similar doctrine in a way that can be easily missed. In Mosiah 3, we learn of an angelic announcement of the coming of the Lord. In response to King Benjamin's prayers, the angel announces to him "glad tidings of great joy," or, in his own words, the angel speaks to him, "concerning that which is to come." In his remarkable message, a message spanning all dispensations (past, present, and future), the angel declares that "the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay" among the Jews (Mosiah 3:1–5).⁷² And yet, the angel indicates that the Jews would reject him, even though they would have received "types, and shadows" and the "law of Moses" to point them to him many years beforehand (Mosiah 3:14–15). In the midst of this teaching, the angel underscores the redemptive implications of his message and touches on those without law or not under law (see Mosiah 3:11, 16). In the following passage, though, the Lord appears to refer to the seed of Lehi, and others of the tribes of Israel among whom he would visit according to the fathers' prophecies.

And the Lord God hath sent his holy prophets *among all the children of men* [before Christ], to declare these things to *every kindred, nation, and tongue*, that thereby *whosoever* should believe that Christ should come, the same might receive remission of their sins, and rejoice with exceedingly great joy, *even as though he had already come among them*. (Mosiah 3:13)⁷³

72. Again, the coming of the Lord to the Jews is described in terms of power. This motif is consistent among the prophets (see Mosiah 13:34; Alma 5:50) and can cause us to confuse it with descriptions of the Second Coming. The angel's phrase, "For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant" (Mosiah 3:5) seems to surface again in the teachings of Alma₂. In Alma 7:7, the prophet writes, "the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people" (i.e., the Jews).

73. Nicholas J. Frederick has explored a similar phrase to that which completes this quotation in his intertextual studies on the Book of Mormon and the New Testament. Nicholas J. Frederick, "If Christ Had Not Come into the World," in *Abinadi: He Came Among Them in Disguise*, ed. Shon D. Hopkin (Provo, UT, and Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2018), 118–21. In his work, Frederick attempts to demonstrate that Abinadi and Paul reason with their audiences in a similar way and in similar words. Both defend the resurrection using

In this way, the angel has suggested to King Benjamin the coming of the Lord among the Jews to perform his blood atonement for all people *and* implied that Christ would also minister “among all the children of men ... to every kindred, nation, and tongue,” including the Lehites and other remnants of the house of Israel. Hence, King Benjamin’s people may rejoice for these two reasons. (Granted, the emphasis, as in all gospel teaching is upon the Redeemer’s blood atonement; however, there appears to be an unstated assumption here that has bearing on this study.) To be clear, it should be noted that the angel could not say, “even as though he had already come among them [every kindred, nation, and tongue],” if Christ were not “already” expected to “come among them.” The word “them” in the line, “even as though he had already come among them,” seems primarily to refer to the remnants of the house of Israel.⁷⁴ Some of the persons the angel refers to are those already scattered among the nations. According to the angel, from the beginning “holy prophets” have been sent among “every kindred, nation, and tongue,” to prepare the way for the Lord’s ministry to them (Mosiah 3:13).⁷⁵ King Benjamin’s teachings are consistent with the teachings of Lehi₁, Nephi₁ (and Zenos), Jacob (Isaiah), and Abinadi. The angel concludes his message on the blood atonement of Christ by projecting out to a latter-day when

what he calls a “hypothetical proposition” or a pattern of if/then statements. Our interest here is less concerned about the resurrection and its defense and more about what the angel claims in King Benjamin’s ears about the coming of the Lord after his resurrection and ascension. The phrase “even as though he [the Lord] had already come among them” seems to state a future event in the past tense. The phrase collapses time and tense. “As though” is hypothetical and directed toward the future, while “had already come” is stated in the past tense. It is not clear whether the angel and King Benjamin inspire Abinadi, or vice versa. John Hilton III has written about the influence of Abinadi on King Benjamin. John Hilton III, “Abinadi’s Legacy: Tracing His Influence through the Book of Mormon,” in *Abinadi: He Came Among Them in Disguise*, ed. Shon D. Hopkin (Provo, UT, and Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2018), 93–116.

74. The prophets among the Jews are not referred to until Mosiah 3:15. The transition is signaled by the phrase “and also.” That is, verse 13 is to be understood universally, whereas verses 14–15 refer to the Jews in particular.

75. The traditional reading of this is that the angel predicts the coming of the Lord to perform his atonement. After all, as John A. Tvedtnes says, the coming of the Lord for that purpose is for the Nephites the “central religious theme” and “principal message” of their prophets’ teachings. That is not disputed here. However, implied in the quotation above is the idea that the Lord will make appearances to the Lehites (and others) around the same time period. John A. Tvedtnes, “That Which is to Come,” in *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone Publishing, 1999), 236.

a “knowledge of a Savior” would be had *again among the children of men* (Mosiah 3:20). In that day, he says, none would be “blameless before God” (Mosiah 3:20–21). Thus, again all would be accountable in the day of the Lord’s Second Coming. This is consistent with the earliest teachings.

In summary, then, from at least the time of Lehi₁, the Nephite prophets had a complex understanding of the coming of the Lord. Their first interest was in the coming of the Lord to the Jews to make atonement for all on conditions of repentance. This is not disputed. Nevertheless, it would seem that the prophets were aware of and taught the coming of the Lord in a variety of ways that support the belief that there was a continuity of understanding among them about the coming of the Lord to the Lehites. Nephi₁ firmly established this tradition among his own people, but it actually can be traced back to Zenos through Nephi₁ (see 1 Nephi 19:10–12). I acknowledge that it is difficult to say what proportion of the Nephites understood these prophecies, but I assume that many of the most faithful must have comprehended them since they would have had the spirit of prophecy as did their leaders, and we know that the Nephi₁ church was taught these doctrines in Alma₂’s day (Alma 16:16–19; see also Mosiah 5:1–4).

In what follows, we will review Alma₂’s teachings and suggest that Alma 5 constitutes a powerful prophecy and warning about the coming of the Lord to the seed of Lehi₁, according to the tradition belonging to his prophet-fathers. Alma₂ prophesies in this manner while also seemingly alluding to the other-sheep doctrine that was perhaps a less defined part of the earlier prophetic tradition (see 1 Nephi 13:41; 1 Nephi 22:25; Mosiah 26:20–28). It is this tangle of prophecies about the coming of the Lord that have been just explained that advocates of discontinuity assume had been lost from the Nephite’s collective memory. In contrast, I claim that there appears to be a continuity on this subject among the prophets and the community of believers, even if there are remaining questions and concerns about the precise sequence and nature of pending events for Alma₂ and his people.

Alma₂’s Prophecy and Warning in Alma 5

Now it is time to turn our attention to Alma 5 to see in which ways that prophetic text reflects the coming of the Lord. Alma 5 is a much-appreciated chapter of scripture among the rank-and-file members of the Lord’s Restored Church. Often its intrinsic power is noted, and its doctrinal content and textual characteristics are taught. Perhaps certain readers view it as a sermon on the power of the word of God,

on repentance from the sin of pride, or on bringing forth good works. Some readers of it may draw attention to its laundry list of penetrating rhetorical questions: “if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?”; others share a verse or two from it to encourage greater devotion or endurance (Alma 5:26). We often hear of the “mighty change” of heart and of having the Lord’s “image in [our] countenances” (Alma 5:14). All this is edifying, but it seems that we are to a degree missing the message of the sermon in our fascination with its individual verses and salient textual features. Here, it is suggested that Alma 5 constitutes a *prophecy and warning* to the Nephite church of the Lord’s coming to the New World to establish among them his kingdom. It is this anticipated event that Alma₂ seems to have sought to better understand. In Alma 5, Alma₂ declares the coming of the Lord and his kingdom. He presents that kingdom in locally relevant and yet also more expansive terms (as he did in Alma 13).

Alma 5 is addressed to a divided people in Zarahemla in about 83 BC during a time of disciplinary regulation. Alma₂ has recently relinquished the judgment seat that he might dedicate his efforts to “bearing down in pure testimony against them” (Alma 4:19). His audience appears to be composed of the proud *and* humble members of the Nephite church, as well as others not of the church who have gathered out of curiosity. Alma₂’s powerful sermon represents an urgent (and at times confrontational) appeal from the head of the church to repent and be born again before the coming of the Lord to his people in this land. In it, Alma₂ reviews recent redemptive history among the fathers in the “land of Mormon” and “in the wilderness” and then asks his listeners a series of penetrating questions to prepare them for the day of the final judgment and, it appears, more immediate events (Alma 5:3, 5). Alma₂ suggests that the proud of the church have fallen into transgressions such as idolatry, sophistry, sexual immorality, and neglect of the poor (Alma 5:55). Thus, he declares repentance to them. Alma₂ warned the proud that the “ax is laid at the root of the tree” and, he says, all they not of the fold of the “good shepherd,” must soon face the consequence (Alma 5:52, Alma 5:37–60). Alma₂ prophesies that all unrepentant “workers of iniquity” will be sooner or later “hewn down and cast into the fire” (Alma 5:35, 52, 56). “For behold,” Alma₂ affirms, “*the time cometh* that whosoever doeth not the works of righteousness, the same [will] have cause to wail and mourn” (Alma 5:36). All this, he insists, is

consistent with what his fathers have taught, “concerning things which are to come” (Alma 5:44).⁷⁶

After explaining that the church members must heed the invitation of the “good shepherd” and prepare themselves for the time to shortly come, Alma₂ asks his people, “Do ye not suppose that I know these things [that Christ will shortly come to us after the judgments of God are manifest] myself” (Alma 5:37; 45)? He says, “Behold, I testify unto you that I do know of these things whereof I have spoken are true” (Alma 5:45). He explains that some of the questions that he once had as a young man have been since put to bed “by the Holy Spirit of God” (Alma 5:46). Alma₂ reports that he has come to understand for himself that these things are true: “Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself” (Alma 5:46). Since his conversion, Alma₂ appears to have learned many truths.⁷⁷ Perhaps as a result of his rebirth (as indicated earlier), Alma₂ begins to take a serious interest in what his fathers had taught about the coming of the Redeemer. This new interest in the teachings of the prophet-fathers appears to have caused Alma₂ in subsequent years to immerse himself in the prophecies. (At the very least, Alma₂ would have had to unlearn what he thought he knew about the scriptures, since he had dedicated himself to destroying the church and fighting against the claims of prophecy when young.) In his season of personal reformation, Alma₂ must have had it confirmed to him “by the Spirit of God” that the Lord would not only come unto the Jews to perform the atonement and resurrection but that he would visit his own people (the Lehites) and establish his earthly kingdom among them. However, despite his efforts, Alma₂ appears not to have found answers to all of his questions about how and when this event would unfold, since, as he later teaches his son, “*there are many mysteries which are kept, that no one knoweth save God himself*” (see Alma 5:46; also Alma 37:11; Alma 40:3).

76. Alma₂'s use of the phrase “hewn down and cast into the fire” in Alma 5:35 appears to refer to earthly events just beyond Alma₂'s day, whereas the phrase's use in Alma 5:52 and 56 seems to refer to the fires of the second death that engulf one beyond the veil of death.

77. Among those truths that Alma₂ learned at the time of his conversion are these: 1) that unless men and women are born of the Spirit, or born of God, they cannot “inherit the [heavenly] kingdom of God” (Mosiah 27:24–27); 2) that his fathers had declared that the “Redeemer” would come into the world (Mosiah 27:30); and 3) that in some future day, “every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess before him” (Mosiah 27:31).

After Alma₂'s conversion at the time the angel reproved him and his friends, he seems to have ruminated on the nuances and gaps in his previous assumptions about the teachings of his fathers, including those teachings connected to the Lord's coming to the Jews and Lehi₁'s seed. Before Alma₂ concludes his message in Alma 5 by commanding the church members in Zarahemla to repent (and inviting the others present to "Come and be baptized unto repentance"), he seems to prepare the hearts and minds of his people with an urgency for what is to come among them. The Lord, the "good shepherd," intends to visit them if not others also (Alma 5:37–38). Here are some of the most relevant statements demonstrating Alma₂'s urgent concern that the Lord would soon come among them:

1. "Behold, ye must prepare *quickly*; for the kingdom of heaven is *soon* at hand" (Alma 5:28)
2. "I say unto you that such an one is not prepared; and I would that he should prepare *quickly*, for the hour is *close* at hand, and he knoweth not when the time shall come; for such an one is not found guiltless" (Alma 5:29).
3. "Wo unto such an one, for he is not prepared, and the time is *at hand* that he must repent or he cannot be saved" (Alma 5:31).⁷⁸

It appears that Alma₂ has at least two truths in mind when he declares to the Nephite church to "prepare quickly" for the "kingdom of heaven is soon at hand." The kingdom is the church, and if it is "soon at hand," then it cannot be already on the earth. What is present cannot be prepared for "quickly," cannot arrive "soon," nor can it be "close at hand." And yet, we know that Alma₂ is "a high priest over the church of God"

78. There is little reason for Alma₂ to prepare his people with such manifest urgency if the Lord is not coming among them to establish his kingdom. In 3 Nephi, we see Jesus Christ establish his church and kingdom anew among the Lehaites. "Old things are done away, and all things have become new" (3 Nephi 12:47; see also 3 Nephi 15:2–3). In response to Metcalfe, Roper argues that time is represented "ambiguously" in the middle part of the Book of Mormon, and thus "simply do[es] not require the narrow interpretation upon which Metcalfe seems to insist." Roper points out that words such as "quickly," "shortly," or "soon" are relative markers of prophetic time. According to Roper, Metcalfe understands Alma₂'s prediction that the "kingdom of heaven is soon at hand" to predict "Jesus's advent," or birth into the world. In contrast to what, I presume, is acceptable to both of them, I understand that phrase, and its accompanying "ambiguous" terminology, to refer to the visitation of the Lord Jesus Christ to the New World. It is then that Jesus will set up his kingdom among the Lehaites. Roper, "More Perfect Priority," 363.

(Alma 5:3), so what “kingdom” can Alma₂ and his people anticipate? On the one hand, just as Alma₂’s fathers did, he appears to have in mind the coming of the Lord to the Jews in Jerusalem to perform the atonement and resurrection, for he has much to say about “his people” (Nephite church) being “cleansed from all stain, through the blood of him of whom it has been spoken by our fathers” (Alma 5:21; see also Alma 5:22–27). And when Jesus came unto the Jews, he did establish his church and kingdom on earth in that region of the earth. So clearly, and most importantly, Alma₂ on the one hand anticipates the coming of the Lord to make himself the atonement for sin (see Alma 5:48; also Moses 4:6–8).

However, on the other hand, Alma₂ seems to have in mind more than that seminal event. He appears to be thinking of the Son of God’s ministry thereafter to his other sheep. I say this because of the general sweep of Alma₂’s sermon. Alma₂ in part declares that “whatsoever I shall say concerning that which is to come, is true” (Alma 5:48). The phrase “whatsoever I shall say” suggests that what Alma₂ has said and will say in Alma 5 is perhaps multifaceted, or that it may reach further than expected. Here again, Alma₂’s address expands in scope (this expansion is signaled in verses 33–36 where Alma₂ uses encompassing words such as “all men” and “whosoever”). Alma₂ explains that he is “called to speak ... unto *this people* ... concerning things which are to come” (Alma 5:44). Then he adds, I am called to preach unto “*everyone that dwelleth in the land; yea, to preach unto all, both old and young, both bond and free*” (Alma 5:49). Here, carried away by angelic zeal (see Alma 29:1–2, 7–8), Alma₂ addresses in what the poets call an apostrophe “*all ye ends of the earth, for,*” he announces, “the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand” (Alma 5:50). This gradual transition in prophetic perspective toward the more universal, while not removing Alma₂’s initial focus on the state of the church, is not accompanied by an image of a virgin or babe but with the “King of heaven” striding forth in colossal power and dominion as “*King of all the earth*” (Alma 5:50). This is but a variation of the good shepherd motif that runs through much of the sermon.⁷⁹

Alma₂ apparently intends to prepare his people for more than their date with death or judgment (both subjects touched on in Alma 5). He also seems to have in mind the coming of the Good Shepherd to his

79. Kings were commonly associated in the Hebrew writings Alma₂ had in possession with shepherds and flocks. King David is the classic example of the royal shepherd. As Alma₂ knew, Lehi₁ and Nephi₁ had combined the royal and pastoral before him (see 1 Nephi 10:12–14; see 1 Nephi 22:24–28).

sheep throughout much of the vineyard.⁸⁰ Alma 5 harmonizes well, then, with his fathers' writings and with what we have already seen present in Alma₂'s other teachings (see Alma 13:22–26; Alma 16:16–17). Alma₂'s message seems to be this: the Nephite church “must prepare quickly; for [the heavenly King and thus] the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand” among them. This prophetic prophecy and warning also fosters hope of good things to come unto all the nations of the earth either directly or indirectly (or both) (see 1 Nephi 19:10–12; Alma 13:22–26). In this context, Alma₂ using his fathers' imagery announces to the Nephite church:

Behold, he [the Good Shepherd] sendeth an invitation *unto all men*, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you.⁸¹

Yea, he saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and waters and life freely.

Yea, come unto me and bring forth works of righteousness, *and ye shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire* —⁸²

For behold, the time is at hand that *whosoever* bringeth forth not good fruit or *whosoever* doeth not the works of righteousness, the same have cause to wail and mourn. (Alma 5:33–36)

Upon reading this invitation “unto all men” to repent and be spared, one wonders whether Alma₂ again describes the final day of judgment (see 5:15–25) or whether he addresses a more imminent event, the same that his fathers had spoken of: the coming of the Lord to the New World

80. The phrase “good shepherd” is used rarely in the Book of Mormon. Nephi₂ is the only other person to use it besides Alma₂ (Alma 5:38–39, 57, 60; Helaman 7:18). There are many references to the shepherd and the sheepfold in the Book of Mormon, and some writers use phrases like “one shepherd” (1 Nephi 13:41; 3 Nephi 15:21; 3 Nephi 16:3); or “true shepherd” (Helaman 15:13); or just “shepherd” (Mormon 5:17), but the phrase “good shepherd” seems almost exclusively to belong to Alma₂. Of course, it is a concept and phrase that has Old Testament origins.

81. Mormon uses this language later in his account of the Good Shepherd's voice speaking to the distraught survivors after their ordeals at the time of his coming to the more righteous part of those assembled at Bountiful.

82. About half of all instances of the phrase “hewn down and cast into the fire” are directly associated with either Zenos's allegory in Jacob 5 or Alma 5 (Jacob 5:42, 46, 66, 6:7; Alma 5:35, 52, 56; see also Helaman 14:18).

and others. Jesus's ministry to his other sheep (the more righteous part of the Lehites) was to personally bring unto this remnant of the house of Israel the blessings of the infinite atonement and his healing power.

In summary, then, in Alma 5 Alma₂ prophesies unto his people that the Lord who comes to make atonement for all will also be the same who establishes his work and kingdom among them and perhaps others among the nations of the earth. These truths he has come to understand by the Holy Ghost. That Alma₂ in Alma 5 (and Alma 13 and 16) prophesies of the coming of the Lord to the seed of Lehi₁ in a future day explains why it is that Mormon who is in possession of the early prophecies appears to allude to Alma₂'s words and general teachings even as he records the events of Helaman and 3 Nephi.

Mormon's Use of Alma₂'s Writings

Many of the fathers' prophecies that appear early on in the Book of Mormon are echoed later in the text. From internal evidence, for instance, we can tell that Lehi₁, Nephi₁, and Zenos influenced later writers, including Alma₂, Samuel the Lamanite, and Mormon in 3 Nephi. This already has been demonstrated. Similarly, figures and their words after Lehi₁, Nephi₁, and Zenos such as Abinadi and King Benjamin are also very influential (see Alma 10:19).⁸³ (One of the most interesting examples of influence is tracing how Mosiah₂'s speech in Mosiah 29 gets picked up later in the decades that precede the coming of the Lord to the Lehites [see Helaman 4:21; Helaman 5:2]). Here, though, it is necessary to understand that Alma 5 and 13 seem to be borrowed from by Mormon in 3 Nephi 8–10. In 3 Nephi, Mormon borrows from Alma₂ without signaling that he is doing so. He does it with a purpose. He desires to demonstrate that the words of the prophets were fulfilled in those events having to do with the coming of the Lord to the Lehites. The first passage wherein Mormon seems to borrow from Alma₂ is Helaman 16:13–14. It corresponds to Alma 13:26. The other place wherein Mormon appears to borrow from Alma₂ is 3 Nephi 8–10. From Mormon's perspective, it appears that these chapters seem to fulfill Alma 5:33–36.⁸⁴ To be clear,

83. Listed here are two works with many contributors who in part explore the influence of Abinadi and King Benjamin. Shon D. Hopkin, ed., *Abinadi: He Came Among Them in Disguise* (Provo, UT, and Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2018) and John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *King Benjamin's Speech Made Simple* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999), <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/46/>.

84. I will later isolate a verse or two for examination: 3 Nephi 9:14, 22.

I am not arguing here that history was influenced by Alma₂ as much as I am asserting that Alma₂ accurately predicted history and that his prophetic words were fulfilled in the coming of Christ to the Lehaites. Mormon's relation of the history in 3 Nephi 8–10 seems to intentionally confirm this.

Mormon's Use of Alma₂ in Helaman

Mormon appears to use Alma₂'s writings as he describes events near the coming of the Lord to the New World. For instance, Mormon's words in Helaman 16:13–14 seem to correspond to Alma₂'s words in Alma 13:22–26. Helaman 16:13–14 (Helaman 16:4–5 appears to lightly echo Alma 16:19–20) represents Mormon's words just following Samuel the Lamanite's second sermon to Zarahemla on the destruction that awaits them if they do not repent as well as on the signs of the Lord's birth and death (and, by implication, resurrection). In Helaman 16, as Mormon concludes his account, he writes the following:

But it came to pass that in the ninetieth year of reign of the judges, there were great signs given unto the people, and wonders; *and the words of the prophets began to be fulfilled.*

And angels did appear unto men, wise men, and did declare unto them glad tidings of great joy; *thus in this year the scriptures began to be fulfilled.* (Helaman 16:13–14)

Among Alma₂'s earlier words to the Ammonihahites in Alma 13:24–26, vs. 26 appears particularly resonant with the above words from Helaman 16:14, if not directly influential. Alma 13:24–26 seems to be one of the prophetic passages that Mormon adapts as he writes of the coming of the Lord to the Lehaites in Helaman 16:13–14:

For behold, angels are declaring it unto many at this time *in our land; and this is for the purpose of preparing the hearts of the children of men to receive his word at the time of his coming in his glory.*

And now we only await to hear the joyful news declared unto us by the mouth of angels, of his [actual] coming; for the time cometh, we know not how soon. Would to God it might be in my day; but let it be sooner or later, in it I will rejoice.

And it shall be made known unto just and holy men, by the mouth of angels, at the time of his coming, *that the words of our fathers may be fulfilled, according to that which they have*

*spoken concerning him, which was according to the spirit of prophecy in them. (Alma 13:24–26)*⁸⁵

The immediate context for Alma 13:26, then, is Alma₂'s teaching to the Ammonihahites that “angels are declaring it [the Lord’s coming] unto many at this time in our land ... for the purpose of preparing the hearts of the children of men to receive his word at the time of his coming in his glory” among them (also see Alma 39:16). Significantly, Alma₂ does not say here that the Lord will not come to them, but he says that “we know not how soon” it will be before he comes to us. He teaches affirmatively that “the time cometh” and that when that time cometh, “it shall be made known.”⁸⁶

Thus, Mormon seems to associate these passages — Alma 13:26 and Helaman 16:14 — to demonstrate that Alma₂'s words were beginning to come to pass. Mormon does this by not only borrowing words from Alma₂ (“men,” “angels,” and “fulfilled”) but by relating clustered concepts. To be specific, Mormon’s phrase “wise men” can reasonably be paired with Alma₂'s phrase “just and holy men”; Mormon’s statement “And angels did appear unto men” may be compared to Alma₂'s “And it shall be made known unto ... men, by the mouth of angels,” and so on (see also Alma 10:20–21).⁸⁷ Both Alma₂ and Mormon also refer to the authorities before

85. The full passage in Alma 13:22–26 is complex and interesting. Earlier in this century, Terryl L. Givens explained that Harold Bloom considered the Book of Mormon’s treatment of the “‘doctrine of angels’ as being of ‘extraordinary interest.’” Passages such as that found in Alma 13:22–26 are among the most interesting on the doctrine of angels. Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6.

86. This passage alludes to two time periods. For Alma₂ first says that angels minister “at this time [in his day]” that Jesus might be received “at the time of his coming in his glory [sometime after his day].” And, he says, although angels already minister to us in preparation for the time when Jesus comes, “we ... wait to hear ... of his [actual] coming.” This later angelic message will be delivered “at the time of his coming” or, we might say, “[closer to] the time of his coming.” Something like this is described in 3 Nephi 19:1–3.

87. And now I [Amulek] say unto you that well doth the Lord judge of your iniquities; well doth he cry unto this people, by the voice of his angels: Repent ye, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Yea, well doth he cry, by the voice of angels that: I will come down among my people, with equity and justice in my hands ... But it is by the prayers of the righteous that ye are spared; now therefore, if ye will cast out the righteous from among you then will not the Lord stay his hand; but in his fierce anger he will come out against you ... and the time is soon at hand except ye repent. (Alma 10:20–21, 23)

them: Mormon refers to the “prophets” and the “scriptures” to make his point; Alma₂ similarly refers to “our fathers” to make essentially the same point. Both Alma₂ and Mormon teach in more or less the same language that, according to the fathers’ prophecies, angels prepare the way of the Lord by appearing unto men. The implication for Mormon’s reader is that Samuel the Lamanite who was sent forth by an angel to preach to the people of Zarahemla is a later fulfillment of Alma₂’s earlier declaration (see Helaman 13:7; Helaman 14:9). Moreover, this angelic activity of which Samuel’s experience is but a part is to prepare the people for the coming of Christ to them.⁸⁸ It is not lost on Mormon that both Alma₂ and Samuel declare repentance in Zarahemla for a similar purpose: to prepare the way of the Lord to them.

As Mormon also must have known, the early part of Samuel’s overall prophecy in Helaman 13–15 seems to represent a doctrinal anomaly that bears on the coming of the Lord. Of the five passages that foretell of the utter destruction of the Nephite civilization using the timeframe of four hundred years (2 Nephi 26:9; Alma 45:4–14; Helaman 13:9; 3 Nephi 27:32; and Mormon 8:6), only Samuel’s teaching in Helaman 13:9 appears to be anchored to the birth of Christ (see Helaman 13:6–7). The other four renditions of the four-hundred-years prophecy rather plainly mark time from the coming of the Lord to the Lehites. This discrepancy among prophecies invites the question: Are we correctly understanding Samuel’s words at Helaman 13:6–7 or is he articulating a different or second prophecy that only resembles the others but is not the same as the others? In Helaman 16, Mormon does not address this question. He appears to assume our understanding of the matter. Mormon treats Samuel’s teachings as if they are in harmony with all the others. And why would they not be? This seeming difference between Samuel and prophets both before and after him is particularly remarkable since Samuel’s teachings fairly plainly borrow from Lehi₁, Nephi₁ (Zenos), and Alma₂. Most importantly, Samuel the Lamanite borrows from 1 Nephi 19:10–12 where Nephi₁ tells us that Zenos prophesied of the coming of the Good Shepherd to many among the house of Israel at the time of the sign of his death. This intertextual reality may also explain in part why Samuel feels confident announcing that the Lord’s coming into the world as a baby among the Jews is in “five years” (Helaman 14:2). I surmise as much because the 1 Nephi 19:10–12 passage also tells us that

88. Hardy also connects the two passages in a footnote (e14). Grant Hardy, ed., *The Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2018), 455.

the Lord comes among the Jews “in six hundred years from the time [Lehi₁] left Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 19:8). It does not seem problematic that Samuel cites an angel as the source of his teachings since he plainly refers to the prophets, prophecies, and the holy scriptures (Helaman 15:7, 13).

For these reasons, I suspect that Mormon borrows from Alma₂ and others to illustrate his point that prophecy is reliable and was indeed coming to pass that the people in Zarahemla might avoid the consequences that both Alma₂ and Samuel had spoken of. Each had warned of fire upon Zarahemla if they did not repent and prepare for the coming of the Lord to them (see Alma 5:33–36 and Helaman 13:11–14). Not unlike Samuel, Mormon interweaves many known prophecies with the events that are transpiring at this season in real time before the people of Nephi₁.

Mormon’s Use of Alma₂ in 3 Nephi

To explain Mormon’s apparent use of Alma 5:33–36 (especially verse 33), will require a bit more explanation and exegetical work than did Mormon’s use of Alma 13:26. To demonstrate how Alma₂ may suggest those very events recorded in 3 Nephi 8–10, I will show how Mormon may use Alma 5:33–36 (and Alma 5:52, 56) to reflect the dramatic events that transpire just before the personal appearance of the Lord to the Lehites. To set the scene, let us remind the reader of the events recorded in 3 Nephi. In addition, Mormon makes an argument that these characteristic events are unto the fulfilling of the fathers’ prophecies (see 3 Nephi 1:4, 13, 18, 20, 26; 3 Nephi 9:16; 3 Nephi 10:11, 14–15; 3 Nephi 11:12). In 3 Nephi 8:6–7 the account describes for us in vivid, natural imagery the destruction foretold by Nephi₁ (Zenos) and Samuel the Lamanite. Indeed, their prophecies predicting thunder, lightning, fire, and darkness in the land are abundantly fulfilled when Jesus comes to the New World (see 1 Nephi 12:4–6; 1 Nephi 19:10–11; 2 Nephi 26:3–9; Helaman 14:26–27; 3 Nephi 8:6–7, 12, 17, 19–20).

Below is Mormon’s historical account and argument for the prophetically anticipated events. Consider these representative passages from Mormon’s account in 3 Nephi 8–10 (there are many others):

And there was also a great and terrible tempest; and there was *terrible thunder*, insomuch that it did shake the whole earth.

...

And there were exceedingly *sharp lightnings*, such as never had been known in all the land.

And the city of *Zarahemla* did take fire [presumably due to the sharp lightning] (see 3 Nephi 8:12, 17, 20, 24; also 3 Nephi 9:3)⁸⁹

Mormon records these events to demonstrate the fulfillment of earlier prophecy. Given that Samuel the Lamanite borrows from Zenos’s relevant prophecy quoted by Nephi₁ that the Lord would visit “some [remnants of the house of Israel on the isles of the sea] with his voice, because of their righteousness, unto their great joy and salvation, and others with the thunderings and the lightnings of his power, by tempest, by fire, and by smoke, and by vapor of darkness,” it seems reasonable to suggest that Alma₂ and Samuel who appear to have that prophecy in mind (if not before them) are also aware that the Lord at this time of destruction would visit “some with his voice because of their righteousness.”

Although Alma₂’s nod to the early Nephite teaching does not itself mention thunder and lightning, it does reference “fire” falling on the unrighteous in Zarahemla while using a phrase characteristic of Zenos’s prophecies (more on this in a second). Further, Alma₂ also predicts that “the time is at hand [soon upon them] that whosoever bringeth forth not good fruit [probably Zenos’s phrase], or whosoever doeth not the works of righteousness, the same have cause to wail and mourn” (Alma 5:35–36). Mormon describes the fulfillment of Alma₂’s (and Helaman’s) words in this similar language:

And it came to pass that it [the sign of darkness] did last for the space of three days that there was no light seen; and there was *great mourning* and *howling* and *weeping* among the people continually; yea, great were the *groanings* of the people, because of the darkness and the great destruction which had come upon them. (3 Nephi 8:23)

Mormon reports that in the darkness and amidst the human suffering, out of heaven “there was a voice heard” by the most righteous part of the people who had been spared (3 Nephi 9:1; see also 3 Nephi 10:3). Significantly, the heavenly “voice” resembles in part Alma₂’s prophetic channeling of the “good shepherd[’s]” voice in

89. Recall that Alma₂ and Samuel the Lamanite predicted this (see Alma 5:35–36; Helaman 13:12–14, 14:20–27).

Alma 5:33–42, 57, 59–62.⁹⁰ According to Mormon, while the righteous lament in utter darkness, “Jesus Christ[,] the Son of God[,]” announces that “the scriptures concerning my coming are fulfilled” (3 Nephi 9:16). Mormon has used those scriptures to prove this very point and will do more of that soon. The Good Shepherd characteristically invites all who have not been cut off to “come unto [him]” (3 Nephi 9:22; see John 10:15–18). Mormon records his tender words of invitation, words that resemble the shepherd’s voice found in the Gospel of John⁹¹:

Yea, verily I [the Good Shepherd] say unto you, if ye will *come unto me* ye shall have eternal life. Behold, *mine arm of mercy is extended towards you*, and whosoever will *come, him will I receive*; and blessed are those who *come unto me*. (3 Nephi 9:14)

As Mormon was apparently aware, it was Alma₂ who declared not many decades before the following while among the church in Zarahemla (and later throughout the land):

Behold, he [the Good Shepherd] sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the *arms of mercy are extended towards them*, and he saith: Repent, *and I will receive you*.

Yea, he saith, *Come unto me* and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea; ye shall eat and drink of the waters of life freely;

Yea, *come unto me . . .* and bring forth works of righteousness, *and ye shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire* —

90. In the current 2013 official edition of the Book of Mormon as well as in the prior 1981 edition printed by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, footnote “a” in 3 Nephi 9:14 cites “Alma 5:34 (33–36),” recognizing the connection. In Alma 5, Alma₂ makes it clear that the invitation that he extends is that of the “good shepherd” (vv. 37–38).

91. 3 Nephi 9 has a robust intertextual relationship with the Gospel of John. This can be determined because it uses familiar Johannine phrases and concepts such as “come unto me;” “I am in the Father, and the Father in me;” and “I am the light and the life of the world” (3 Nephi 9:13–18). This intertextual relationship becomes even clearer when the speaker, “a voice heard among all the inhabitants of the earth, upon all the face of this land,” identifies himself as “Jesus Christ the Son of God” and employs language we associate with John 10:15–18. John 10:15–18 is where we find the Old-World pronouncement of the Good Shepherd about his duty to visit his other sheep. Specifically, the Nephite account employs the familiar sentiment that “for such I [Good Shepherd] have laid down my life, and have taken it up again” (3 Nephi 9:22; see John 10:17–18).

For behold, the time is at hand that whosoever bringeth forth not good fruit, or whosoever doeth not the works of righteousness, *the same has cause to wail and mourn.* (Alma 5:33–36; see also 3 Nephi 9:13)

Notice how Alma₂'s words both allude to the dream and vision of his fathers Lehi₁ and Nephi₁ (and Zenos) as well as parallel those words found in 3 Nephi 9:14 (see italicized words above) where the Good Shepherd begins to invite his bewildered sheep who nevertheless hear his invitation in the darkness to "Come unto [him]." The passage's use of "fire" and "wail and mourn" in context with the fathers (including Zenos) may also suggest something of the destruction that awaits the unrepentant at the Lord's coming. At least Mormon seems to think so. Significantly, some of these phrases are rather unique in scripture,⁹² thus making it more likely that Alma₂'s words are adapted by Mormon, who apparently sees in them the fulfillment of Alma₂'s prophecy (and others' prophecies).⁹³ From here (Alma 5:33–36), as mentioned, Alma₂ stresses

92. Noel B. Reynolds and Jeff Lindsay have pointed out that the verb sequence of *weep*, *wail*, and *gnash* can be found in Mosiah 16:2 and Alma 40:13. This is the standard sequence in scripture for the words. They have explained that this phrasal sequence could possibly derive from the brass plates version of the Book of Moses since the series of verbs occur in proximity in Moses 1:22. See Parallel #59 in Jeff Lindsay and Noel B. Reynolds, "'Strong Like unto Moses': The Case for Ancient Roots in the Book of Moses Based on Book of Mormon Usage of Related Content Apparently from the Brass Plates," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 44 (2021): 1–92, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/strong-like-unto-moses-the-case-for-ancient-roots-in-the-book-of-moses-based-on-book-of-mormon-usage-of-related-content-apparently-from-the-brass-plates/>.

93. Alma₂'s phrase "arms of mercy are extended towards them" seems to influence 3 Nephi 9:14 (again, footnote "a" in the current official edition of the Book of Mormon in that verse cites "Alma 5:34 (33–36)" as a relevant passage). Actually, Alma₂ may have received the phrase (or a variant of it) from either Jacob (see Jacob 6:5) or Abinadi (see Mosiah 16:12). It is interesting to note that Jacob uses the phrase in context with a second phrase found in Alma 5:33–36: "hewn down and cast into the fire." That phrase must be Zenos's. It is found at least five times in the allegory Jacob records for us (see Jacob 5:42, 46–47, 49, and 66). The phrase "hewn down and cast into the fire," a phrase used by Alma₂ three times in Alma 5 (verses 35, 52, and 56), is generally used to refer to the second death at final judgment. But, in one instance it is used to refer to the fire we associate with the judgments at the Second Coming (see Mormon 8:21). Alma₂'s use of the phrase seems to refer to the judgments we associate with the coming of the Lord to the Lehites, an event that is a type of the Second Coming, as mentioned.

Lastly, Alma₂'s phrase "wail and mourn" is rather peculiar. The closest scriptural phrases to it are found in Micah 1:8, 3 Nephi 8:25, or 3 Nephi 10:10. It

in his sermon to Zarahemla the importance of heeding the “voice of the good shepherd” (Alma 5:37–38). As also indicated, he seems to declare these words unto all people of the earth even though only his congregation in Zarahemla can hear him. Alma₂ declares with the zeal of an angel:

Yea, thus saith the Spirit: Repent, *all ye ends of the earth*, for the kingdom of heaven is soon at hand; yea, the Son of God cometh in his glory, in his might, majesty, power, and *dominion*. I say unto you, that the Spirit saith: Behold the glory of the King *of all the earth*; and also the King of heaven shall very soon shine forth *among all the children of men*. (Alma 5:50; see also 3 Nephi 11:14; 3 Nephi 22:5)

Before concluding his sermon, Alma₂, now considering the fires of the spiritual death, warns the church again about being “hewn down and cast into the fire” (Alma 5:52, 56), exhorting them to heed the “voice of the good shepherd” (Alma 5:37–39, 41, 57, 60). Accordingly, it seems plausible that Alma₂ anticipates (with the Nephite church) the coming of the Lord to the Lehites (and others). As stated, this claim is suggested to us by Mormon who attempts to demonstrate over and over in his abridgment of Nephi₁’s large plates that the sophisticated and nuanced prophecies of Alma₂ (and the prophecies of others before and after him) were fulfilled at the time of the Lord’s coming to the seed of Lehi₁. Indeed, Mormon says that the thunder and lighting and fire and darkness and wailing and mourning of the Lehites at the Lord’s coming are signs unto the fulfilling of many of the prophets’ words. Mormon explains that “many [prophets] have testified of these things at the time of the coming of Christ” (3 Nephi 10:15). He thus exhorts us to search the scriptures and see if it is not so (see 3 Nephi 10:14).

We have attempted to conduct a search of the scriptures in this paper to determine the awareness of the Nephites of the coming of Christ

is a rare phrase that seems to foreshadow the destructive events found in 3 Nephi (see 3 Nephi 8–10 and 3 Nephi 10:10). Mormon seems conscious of such prophecies as Alma₂’s in his account (see 3 Nephi 10:11). Modern scripture (not the Book of Mormon itself) predominantly uses the comparable but standard phrase, “weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth” (see D&C 19:5; 85:9; 133:73). To wail is to howl, cry, weep, anguish, or lament. According to Mormon, Alma₂’s reference to fire (in Zarahemla) and wailing and mourning seems to have documented fulfillment in 3 Nephi 8–10. Even if this is not so, Mormon appears to borrow from Alma 5 to make his case, thus he treats it as a prophecy with relevance to the Lord’s coming to the Lehites.

during the middle portion of the Book of Mormon using the sermons and teachings of Alma₂. It is my thesis that Alma₂ is one of those prophets who foretold of Jesus's coming to the Lehites and did so in Alma 5 and in many other places in his writings. All this has been laid out. In addition, Alma₂ seems to have had more in mind than even that. His teachings correspond to Nephi₁'s (Zenos's) and also are confirmed by Samuel the Lamanite and Mormon himself. This is the continuity I spoke of earlier. It is not straightforward or irrefutable in every detail, but it is discernible and has scriptural warrant. Subscribing to doctrinal continuity from Nephi₁ to Alma₂ (and perhaps through Mormon) on this matter of the Lord's coming to the New World seems a very feasible stance.

Conclusion

In summary, near the end of Alma 5, Alma₂ declares that according to his divine priesthood commission, he has spoken in the "energy of [his] soul" unto "everyone that dwelleth in the land" (Alma 5:43). He has attempted to speak in a manner so "plainly ... concerning the things which are to come" that his people "cannot err" (Alma 5:43). Alma₂ has spoken of those sacred prophecies attributed to the "fathers" (Alma 5:47). He has borne witness in these terms: "I say unto you, that I know of myself that whatsoever I [have said and] shall say unto you, concerning that which is to come, is true" (Alma 5:47). All this has been Alma₂'s duty and according to his holy calling and order. He explains:

For I am called to speak after this manner, according to the holy order of God, which is in Christ Jesus; yea, I am commanded to stand and testify unto this people *the things which have been spoken by our fathers concerning the things which are to come.* (Alma 5:44)

Alma₂ then asks his somewhat resistant audience to consider his testimony and how it came to him,

Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself? Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety?

Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. *Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I know of myself [and not merely due to the fathers' writings] that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me*

by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me. (Alma 5:45–46)

In the foregoing, a good-faith response to the scholars advocating for discontinuity has been attempted to further explore the intriguing observation that after Nephi₁ the teaching that the Lord would come among the Lehites was not widely circulated or understood. These scholars' valuable observations have prompted a deeper look into this subject, and thus have inspired this project. It has been asserted here that Alma₂ often taught that the Lord would soon come among them (see Alma 5, 7, 13, 16, 39). Indeed, he apparently urgently attempted to prepare them for the occasion. However, Alma₂ was careful not to make definitive claims about *when* or *how* the event(s) would occur, much as he sets aside these issues (mysteries) about the appointed times, kinds, and numbers of the resurrection in Alma 40. Here, we have addressed concerns about problem passages in the Book of Mormon and the early and late prophecies and teachings of the fathers. In so doing, we have attempted to demonstrate from Alma₂'s teachings at Zarahemla, Gideon, Ammonihah, and elsewhere that he was aware of and relatively clear-headed about the reality of the coming of the Lord to the New World. He even appears to have broadened that picture either by taking his cue from his ancient fathers' teachings (i.e., those of Zenos, Isaiah, and Nephi₁) or as moved upon by the spirit of revelation and prophecy. Thus, Alma₂ taught that the coming of the Lord in the first century would not only be to the Jews and the Lehites, but that it would entail a semi-universal quality and would be accompanied by angelic ministration and power and glory.

This secondary claim, provides a valuable perspective on Alma₂'s teachings (and the feverish prophetic and angelic activity he describes occurring in so many other parts of the earth) because we typically associate the first coming of the Lord to the Jews in the Old World with Jesus's obscurity, poverty, and meekness.⁹⁴ And yet, the prophets, including Alma₂, testified that the Lord's first coming was to be in great power and authority and unto many (1 Nephi 19:10–11; Alma 5:50;

94. Parley P. Pratt's hymn "Jesus, Once of Humble Birth" encapsulates the traditional approach to the first and second comings of the Lord. In the hymn, the speaker contrasts the Lord's first coming with that of his second, "Jesus, once of humble birth, Now in glory comes to earth. Once he suffered grief and pain; Now he comes on earth to reign. Now he comes on earth to reign." ("Jesus Once of Humble Birth," *Hymns*, no. 196.) Alma₂ speaks of both comings as universal and in power and glory.

Alma 13:22, 24; Alma 16:16, 17, 19–20). The King of all the earth, the Good Shepherd, would come unto the children of men scattered among all nations. In that sense, his first-century advent (or his first-century advents) is a reliable pattern for the Second Coming, when Christ again will make multiple appearances unto various assemblies of believers expectantly awaiting his arrival. No one knows the day or hour of those appearances, but we do know that he will come among us and others. Like the Nephite church in Alma₂'s day, we also must prepare the way of the Lord, "making his paths straight" (Alma 7:19). Relatively soon he will reveal himself unto all who are spared the fires of divine judgment (see D&C 133:19–21). And, as Alma₂ taught concerning the Lord's first appearance and ministry, he will again stand among us and establish his kingdom anew. After the Good Shepherd manifested himself to his other sheep among the Lehites, they lived in peace and love for hundreds of years until they again, according to the prophecies, "dwindled in unbelief" (Alma 45:9–14; Helaman 13:9).⁹⁵ A similar season of peace and rest at the Second Coming will be ushered in for a thousand years. "The Prince of Peace" will reign "and the government shall be upon his shoulder" (Isaiah 9:6–7).

Lastly, in this study it has been suggested that Alma 5 is a prophetic warning consistent with earlier prophecies and later recorded history. Particularly in the latter part of Alma 5 it seems that Alma₂ has in mind the ministry of the Lord to his people after his resurrection from the dead. He is represented in that part of the sermon as great in power and dominion and as striding upon the earth and establishing his universal kingdom in some first-century sense. This is apparently what Alma₂ had learned by the "Holy Spirit of God" since the coming of the angel to him and his friends after their rebellions. We have seen that Alma₂, as a student of the scriptures, had clearly understood that the

95. In Alma 45:10, we learn that the prophet had clear understanding of the coming of Christ to his father's seed: he says that in "four hundred years from the time that Jesus Christ shall manifest himself unto them, [the Nephites] shall dwindle in unbelief." This clear statement suggests that Alma₂ assumes a knowledge of the Lord's coming as he prophesies of a later apostasy and destruction. This prophecy is consistent with statements from Nephi₁ (1 Nephi 12:19–20), Samuel (Helaman 13:9), Jesus himself (3 Nephi 27:32), and others. Although Alma₂ did not know the exact time of the Lord's coming among them, he apparently had a sharp sense of the end of his people, for he says that all this will occur in "four hundred years" from the "time that Jesus Christ shall manifest himself" to the seed of Lehi₁. This prophecy, in contrast to the others about Christ's coming in power to all the earth, "shall not be made known, even until the prophecy is fulfilled" (Alma 45:9).

Redeemer would come among the Jews, and that he yet sought to further understand the precise nature of his ministry on earth thereafter. Alma₂ can be seen to struggle for more precise knowledge of the events that would occur among his own people. In the course of Alma 5, we see him compelled by the “Holy Spirit” to declare repentance and baptism as well as to prophesy of the coming of the Good Shepherd to his other sheep, to all those who would hear his voice and harden not their hearts in advance of his coming. We have seen that this is fulfilled at the time of the Lord’s coming when Mormon emphatically points out that the prophecies concerning his coming have been fulfilled.

Through the spirit of revelation and prophecy, Alma₂ felt driven to travel throughout the Nephite lands declaring the coming of the Lord among his people and the urgency of setting the church in order that the people of the Lord might receive their King and Shepherd and be spared the calamities associated with that day of salvation and reckoning. There remain questions about the continuity of the prophecies concerning the Lord’s coming to the Jews and his other peoples on the face of the earth after Alma₂, but it seems that it cannot be doubted that Alma₂, student of Nephi₁ and others, taught fairly widely that the coming of the Lord would be to his own people and unto others of his sheep elsewhere on earth.

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