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FOUNDATION FOR ANCIENT RESEARCH AND MORMON STUDIES

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# The Nature of God in the Book of Mormon

## Summary:

The Book of Mormon is a book about God. It provides one of the most powerful treatments of the nature of God of any other book in Latter-day Saint scripture. Robert Millet puts forth arguments to show that the Book of Mormon does not depict only one God. Jesus Christ is the central character, but the fact that there is a God separate from Christ comes through early on.

Transcript  
Book of Mormon, Teachings

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Transcript of a lecture given at the FARMS Book of Mormon Lecture Series.

# The Nature of God in the Book of Mormon

Robert Millet

We are going to deal with Gods and the Godhead in the Book of Mormon today. It occurred to me once that the Prophet Joseph Smith's statement that a man could get nearer to God by abiding by the precepts in the Book of Mormon has to do not only with its spiritual power, with its impact, but also because of the fact the Book of Mormon is a book about God and that it provides, if we look for it, one of the most powerful treatments of the nature of God of any of the other books in our scriptures.

Something else, by way of introduction, is the idea that the 20th section of the Doctrine and Covenants speaks of the Book of Mormon as proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true. Well, that holy scripture happens to be the Bible, and the Book of Mormon helps to establish the essential truthfulness of the Bible, including the Bible's witness that, as the Doctrine and Covenants says, there is a God, who is infinite, and eternal, and is unchangeable, and from beginning to end is the same. That is what we will try to talk about today.

By way of introduction also, before we dive into this, consider with me for a minute: where would the knowledge of God have come from for the Nephites? How would they have known what they knew? What is one place? The brass plates would be central, and we are going to refer to some specific teachings about God and Gods from the brass plates. Where else, besides the brass plates? All right, the traditions concerning God taught by the prophets and families over the generations. Other ways? How about an independent revelation? Which we have early on. We have Lehi who, caught up to the throne of God, sees the Father and the Son. We have Nephi having a similar experience with God, with Christ—and so, independent revelation. I think that is at least three ways. Can you think of any other ways? The brass plates, independent revelations and traditions and teachings of fathers, mothers and prophets.

Let's then begin our discussion of the Gods of the Nephites by considering, first of all, the reality of someone who doesn't always take center stage in the Book of Mormon, and that is the reality of what we would call our Heavenly Father, or the reality of Elohim in the Book of Mormon.

Let's go to 1 Nephi 10 and we are going to look at verse 4. Now, what's our background here? The first eight chapters represent Nephi's abridgement of his father's experiences, the ninth chapter is sort of a transition chapter, and in the tenth Nephi begins to tell of his own experiences; but he can't completely move to his own experiences, he still has something to say about Dad's teachings—Lehi.



Verse 4: "Yea, even six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem, a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or, in other words, a Savior of the world." Look at the language: from the time my father left Jerusalem, six hundred years, a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews, even a Messiah. That phrase *Lord God* there seems to refer, I think, to Heavenly Father, Elohim.

Let's take another. Mosiah 2:34—this would of course be King Benjamin. Notice the language here: "I say unto you, that there are not any among you, except your little children that have not been taught concerning these things, but what knoweth that ye are eternally indebted to your heavenly Father, to render to him all that you have and are; and also have been taught concerning the records which contain the prophecies which have been spoken by the holy prophets, even down to the time our father, Lehi, left Jerusalem."

Notice that we are indebted to *your heavenly Father*. You will hear people speak frequently about the fact that the Book of Mormon is trinitarian in nature. You will hear people say the Book of Mormon really only has one God. I think that does not show a careful reading of the text. Heavenly Father is there. I think we would have to admit that Jesus is the central character; Jehovah is the central character of the Book of Mormon, and the Book of Mormon testifies of Him predominately, but the fact that there is a God to Christ comes through early on.

The other idea that I would like us to keep in mind is the concept of worship as taught in the Book of Mormon. There is no question that you worship Christ in the Book of Mormon in a certain way, as Elder McConkie pointed out some years ago, in the sense that we are reverentially grateful and appreciative for what he has done, in the sense that we seek to imitate and emulate his life. But, the other thing that comes through is that we worship the Father in the name of the Son.

For example, in 2 Nephi 25:16, Nephi is speaking; notice the language (at the same time would someone go to Jacob 4:5 for us). Notice this language; in fact, to get it in context, verse 15:

"Wherefore the Jews shall be scattered among all nations; yea, and also Babylon shall be destroyed; wherefore, the Jews shall be scattered by other nations.

"And after they have been scattered, and the Lord God hath scourged them by other nations for the space of many generations, yea, even down from generation to generation until they shall be persuaded to believe in Christ, the Son of God, and the atonement, which is infinite for all mankind—and when that day shall come that they shall believe in Christ [and notice the language], and worship the Father in his name, with pure hearts and clean hands, and look not forward any more for another Messiah, then, at that time, the day will come that it must needs be expedient that they should believe these things." The ultimate source of worship, the ultimate object of our worship is the Father—we do it in the name of the Son.

Now without us all turning to it, read Jacob 4:5. This is Jacob's discussion:

"Behold, they believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name, and also we worship the Father in his name. And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness, even as it was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son."

Notice the language: they worshipped (meaning the ancients) they worshipped the Father in the name of the Son, and also we worship the Father in the name of the Son. See the language. Early on we learn that prayer is to the Father in the name of the Son. Now, what am I trying to point up here? Well, were the Nephites Mormons? Not in the same sense we would speak of a Mormon today, but they were Christians.

A colleague of mine, Kent Jackson, suggested some years ago in an article he wrote, that maybe what is taking place, as the Book of Mormon begins, is we are being initiated into a restoration; that we are living in a time of apostasy in the Old World, and the Lord, through Lehi/Nephi begins a restoration. I'll give you a couple of references: 2 Nephi 32:9, very early on, we are to pray to the Father in the name of the Son; later in our story, Mormon 9:27, and Moroni 8:3, prayer to the Father in the name of the Son.

The ones I would like us to look at that I find very interesting are the brass plates prophets. What do I learn from studying the brass plates in the Book of Mormon? Think about that question. Think about the fact that Lehi prophesied early on, once he got those brass plates, "These brass plates should go to every nation, kindred, tongue and people." Later, when Alma, in chapter 37, is speaking of the brass plates, he says the same thing: they are to go to every nation, kindred, tongue and people. How? How will the brass plates go to every nation, kindred, tongue and people? How are the brass plates going to go to everybody; we don't even have them, how are they going to go to everybody?

We have a pretty strong witness in the Book of Mormon as to their importance, and they quote them, and we have little historical details from the brass plates about the ancient prophets that we don't have in Genesis, Exodus and so on. The brass plates, we find, are terribly Christ centered; they are gospel centered. For example, go to Alma 33; and notice we will refer to two brass plates prophets in a row concerning what they teach about God and the Godhead. Alma 33. What is our context here? Looking where we are, where is our setting in Alma 33? What is going on? What went on in the previous chapter?

*Student:* Alma is talking to the people about faith.

To whom? To the humble Zoramites. So these chapters deal with the teachings to the Zoramites. Unfortunately, we usually stop our study of faith with 32, when, in fact, 33 is a very important part of that study. What was one of their concerns? The poor Zoramites could not do what? Could not worship in the synagogues. So what is it that Alma is going to do to show them that you don't have to have a building to do it? He is going to quote some ancient prophets. Now, who are these brass plates prophets? When do they live? I'm not sure we know. We know they lived since Abraham. They are important to Nephi and the other prophets, especially Zenos. Notice in chapter 33:2. Who would like to read for us? Verse 2; we are going to have you read quite a bit.

"And Alma said unto them: Behold, ye have said that ye could not worship your God because ye are cast out of your synagogues. But behold, I say unto you, if ye suppose that ye cannot worship God, ye do greatly err, and ye ought to search the scriptures; if ye suppose that they have taught you this, ye do not understand them. [Now he is going to refer to a specific prophet.]

"Do ye remember to have read what Zenos, the prophet of old, has said concerning prayer or worship?

"For he said: Thou art merciful, O God, for thou hast heard my prayer, even when I was in the wilderness; yea, thou wast merciful when I prayed concerning those who were mine enemies, and thou didst turn them to me.

"Yea, O God, and thou wast merciful unto me when I did cry unto thee in my field; when I did cry unto thee in my prayer, and thou didst hear me.

"And again, O God, when I did turn to my house thou didst hear me in my prayer.

"And when I did turn unto my closet, O Lord, and prayed unto thee, thou didst hear me.

"Yea, thou art merciful unto thy children when they cry unto thee, to be heard of thee and not of men, and thou wilt hear them.

"Yea, O God, thou hast been merciful unto me, and heard my cries in the midst of thy congregations."

What are the different places he has told you you can pray? Look back: field, house, closet, congregations. Notice, see the message that Zenos is preaching. This is a part of a prayer of Zenos, and we are learning doctrine from the prayer. Go ahead. Verse 10:

"Yea, thou hast also heard me when I have been cast out and have been despised by mine enemies; yea, thou didst hear my cries, and wast angry with mine enemies, and thou didst visit them in thine anger with speedy destruction."

Now, here is a key verse. So far, we have learned about praying and where you can do it. Now, we come to the matter of what is Zenos going to teach us about the Godhead. Go ahead.

"And thou didst hear me because of mine afflictions and my sincerity; and it

is because of thy Son that thou hast been thus merciful unto me, therefore I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions, for in thee is my joy; for thou hast turned thy judgments away from me, because of thy Son."

Anything leap out in that verse? Praying to the Father in the name of the Son. The judgments of God have been turned away because of the atonement of the Son. Now, tell me this. Here are the brass plates. We somewhat equate the brass plates with what? The Bible, or Old Testament. But compare and contrast Old Testament teachings with that verse. Tell me what you know about the Father and the Son in the Old Testament? Yes, Jehovah is the only God we know about. Here you have people who are living in Old Testament times, we could call them Old Testament-like prophets, who are teaching a defined concept of Godhead. Do you see what I am saying? You are praying to the Father in the name of the Son and the judgments are turned away because of the Son. Are you with me? Now there is one prophet. We need someone else to pick us up now about verse 12. Who wants to read for us?

"And now Alma said unto them: Do ye believe those scriptures which have been written by them of old?

"Behold, if ye do, ye must believe what Zenos said; for, behold he said: Thou hast turned away thy judgments because of thy Son.

"Now behold, my brethren, I would ask if ye have read the scriptures? If ye have, how can ye disbelieve on the Son of God?

"For it is not written that Zenos alone spake of these things, but Zenock also spake of these things—

"For behold, he said: Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son."

Notice the same language. What is Zenock now teaching? He is the second brass plates prophet. He is teaching "they will not understand thy mercies"; the Lord is upset because they will not understand the mercies that you have bestowed upon them because of thy Son. There is that Father-Son, atonement of the Son doctrine coming through, which does not come through very clearly in our present Old Testament. And so, when we said earlier that the Nephites are relying heavily upon brass plates information, can you appreciate what is going on here? They would have information that perhaps, as far as we know, might have been much clearer concerning the nature of God/Godhead, than their colleagues in the Old World. Any comments or questions on that?

How about, then, if we have the Father established, we worship the Father in the name of the Son, we pray to the Father in the name of the Son, the nature of the Godhead is understood.

The other thing I would like to point out is that in the Book of Mormon early on (let's go to 1 Nephi 6), the concept comes through of Christ as the God of ancient

Israel. 1 Nephi 6. (We need somebody to turn to chapter 19, at the same time, if they would.) 1 Nephi 6. This is another one of those little transition-type chapters. This is a brief chapter stating Nephi's views regarding the plates; how he felt about the small plates in particular. Let's read in context verse 3:

"And it mattereth not to me that I am particular to give a full account of all the things of my father, for they cannot be written upon these plates, for I desire the room that I may write of the things of God."

Now notice this verse: "For the fulness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved." Now at that point that is all we know; we are going to come unto the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Now who's got chapter 19? Let's go to 1 Nephi 19. Notice the language here, starting about verse 10.

"And the God of our fathers, who were led out of Egypt, out of bondage, and also were preserved in the wilderness by him, yea, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, yieldeth himself, according to the words of the angel, as a man, into the hands of wicked men, to be lifted up, according to the words of Zenock, and to be crucified, according to the words of Neum, and to be buried in a sepulchre, according to the words of Zenos, which he spake concerning the three days of darkness, which should be a sign given of his death unto those who should inhabit the isles of the sea, more especially given unto those who are of the house of Israel."

Thank you. We got a little bonus here. We went here to talk about the God of our fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and what do we learn about him? He is going to be lifted up, and crucified. But we learn some other things. Here we are introduced to three of the brass plates prophets. We have Zenock teaching certain things. We have Neum teaching certain things. We have Zenos teaching certain things. Look at the particulars; look at the detail: three days of darkness, crucifixion, and so on. That is what I said earlier. The brass plates are very Christ-centered, very gospel-centered.

*Student question:* We know that the Book of Mormon talks about the brass plates, but what will be some of the other ways that the brass plates will be given to every nation, kindred, and tongue, like the Book of Mormon says?

Good question. Earlier, we said one way is that it will go through the Book of Mormon. It just seems to me that there has to come a time when, eventually, the Lord restores the brass plates to us, raises up a prophet who is capable of doing so and translates them.

*Student question:* So he will have to raise up a prophet?



Well, they will have to raise up someone or endow the person that is raised up to translate.

*Student question:* Is there any evidence, at all, that other people in Jerusalem would have had copies, or how many people would have had access to the brass plates? While they were in Jerusalem, how many copies were there around; do we know?

I think we have no idea. What I think we can be sure of is this—not everybody had their scriptures written on metal. I think it would be tough to go to church with your scriptures that way. What do you find in the Book of Mormon, and maybe that is the best pattern? You find scriptures written on other things, whether it was on papyrus or scrolls or whatever.

For example, when Alma and Amulek are witnessing people being burned, there is something else that is burned—books of scripture. When Abinadi is preaching to King Noah and his priests, what is he doing? He is reading from scripture. Now my guess is, hoards of people are not carrying metal plates around, so what I think you have is a few sets of metal plates, and many sets of other kinds of more accessible scriptural records. How much do we know about it? We only know that Laban had possession of the brass plates. Beyond that, I don't know that we know anything.

I think that we can presume that it was a record that was a northern record. There is an interesting detail that comes through later in 3 Nephi. Why don't we turn to that for a second. 3 Nephi chapter 10, I think it is. The destruction has taken place in America. The voice of Christ has come. Look at verse 15, 3 Nephi 10:15, and we get this in context:

"Behold, I say unto you, Yea, many have testified of these things at the coming of Christ [we assume this is Mormon talking], and were slain because they testified of these things."

Now notice verse 16: "Yea, the prophet Zenos did testify of these things, and also Zenock spake concerning these things, [now watch this language] because they [Zenos and Zenock] testified particularly concerning us [the Lehites], who are the remnant of their seed." Now does that tell me anything about Zenos and Zenock? It sounds like the descendants of Lehi are descendants of Zenos and Zenock, doesn't it? They are quoting family members.

*Student comment:* So maybe that is why they quoted them so much.

I'm sure that is one of the reasons. This is family they are quoting. I think we can assume, at least it has been assumed, that this is a northern record that is being kept to the north. We are naming prophets that we know nothing about. One other is Ezias. He is named in Helaman, chapter 8. Yes?

*Student question:* Might that explain why there may not have been too many copies of this record in Jerusalem at the time, since it was in the south?

It's possible that one of the reasons is because it had been kept in the north and it was brought down to the South. You notice when, in 721, the scattering of the northern tribes takes place, scattering entails certain people moving south, including Lehi's ancestors. We've got members of the tribe of Joseph coming south.

So, Jesus Christ, the God of Ancient Israel. That is the other thing that comes through very early. Now, what can we say about the Holy Ghost? What do I know early on? Does anything come to mind? We've talked about the Father as a reality, Elohim. We've talked about Jesus Christ as the God of ancient Israel, and we've gotten from the brass plates prophets, at least, some pretty specific detail about his death, burial, and resurrection. What do I know about the Holy Ghost? What is the first encounter you can think of? Holy Ghost.

*Student:* Appearing to Nephi.

Where would I go for that?

*Student:* Chapter 11?

In fact, let's go to 10 and we will look at 10 and 11 together. 1 Nephi 10. One of the early lessons, and it is a marvelous lesson that comes through the Book of Mormon, is this idea we learn from Nephi's experience, that God does not just endow and bless office holders. It is not just prophets that get to see the visions of heaven. It is not just prophets who get to have marvelous experiences with the Spirit, it's worthy people.

And one of the principles that comes through in 1 Nephi 10 (let's look at that first, verse 17) is that idea. What Joseph Smith once taught—remember how he said this: God hath not given unto Joseph anything that he will not make known unto the twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things, as quickly as he is able to bear it. Moses' concept—would God that all the Lord's people were prophets. This idea comes through. Verse 17:

"And it came to pass after I, Nephi, having heard all the words of my father, concerning the things which he saw in a vision, and also the things which he spake by the power of the Holy Ghost, which power he received by faith on the Son of God [there's that power of the Holy Ghost, he received it by faith on the Son of God]—and the Son of God was the Messiah who should come—I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him [seek God], as well in times of old as in the time that he should manifest himself unto the children of men.

"For he is the same yesterday, today, and forever [that is to say God constantly

reveals himself to those who seek Christ]; and the way is prepared for all men from the foundation of the world, if it so be that they repent and come unto him.

"For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God [that is to say those things that can only be known by revelation] shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost [there it is again], as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round."

Now, what is the lesson coming through there again? God blesses all men and women who seek. Prophets and apostles stand as the example; they are not the exclusive case. Now, with that in mind, isn't it interesting that the following chapter comes about. As we have it, Nephi sits pondering, experiences some marvelous things as the Spirit and then an angel takes him through quite an extensive vision.

Let's go to chapter 11 then and notice that he has seen the tree, and is given to understand that that tree is symbolic of the love of God as manifest in Christ. Now, let's pick up in chapter 11 with verse 9. Who wants to read for us now? I will have you read through 11.

"And it came to pass after I had seen the tree, I said unto the Spirit: I behold thou hast shown unto me the tree which is precious above all.

"And he said unto me: What desirest thou?

"And I said unto him: To know the interpretation thereof—for I spake unto him as a man speaketh; for I beheld that he was in the form of a man; yet nevertheless, I knew that it was the Spirit of the Lord; and he spake unto me as a man speaketh with another."

There seems to be at least a couple of possibilities for interpretation on this, aren't there? What are the possibilities as to who Nephi is speaking to? (1) Premortal Messiah, Christ himself. The Spirit Lord, as it were. (2) The Holy Ghost. Now the latter would make this a bit unusual, would it not? Why? How many instances can you think of, scripturally, where we have the Holy Ghost appearing? I suppose we would describe what takes place at the baptism of Jesus as something of that sort. What if I wanted to know what this meant? What if I wanted to know whether it was A or B? How might I study it out? What approach might I take to know what this text might mean? How might I do it?

*Student:* Study it out in your mind?

Well, that is one thing. Pray about it and get a revelation. That is probably the best. For those of us who don't get them quite that easily, is there another approach?

*Student:* Compare the different usages of that phrase *the spirit of the Lord* in the Book of Mormon, or where else it is used.



It occurs forty times, exactly forty times. That is an interesting study in itself. I think you will find, if you go back and read the forty references to it, you will find that just about every time the phrase *Spirit of the Lord* refers to either the Holy Ghost, most of the time, or occasionally the light of Christ. My preference is to suppose this is an appearance of the Holy Ghost. Elder Talmage, in *The Articles of Faith*, suggested that is what he felt it meant. President Romney, in a conference address, in April of 1974, suggested the same thing. Again, making it a pretty singular occasion where the Holy Ghost, as a person, appears as a spirit man.

So we learn early on that the powers of the Holy Ghost are real, we learn that God constantly reveals himself, by the Holy Ghost, to those who seek and search, and we learn that the Holy Ghost is in the form of a man, a spirit personage. That is pretty good insight and we haven't covered but eleven chapters, twenty pages in the Book of Mormon. Any questions so far, or comments up to there?

Let's turn our attention to another aspect of the Holy Ghost and say one or two things about the Holy Ghost and we'll move on. Go with me to 2 Nephi 31. Do you recognize this chapter, one of the most quoted in the Book of Mormon? What is this chapter about, basically?

*Student:* It talks about Christ's baptism, about the Holy Ghost.

Baptism, the Holy Ghost. This is Nephi's discussion of what he calls the Doctrine of Christ. Now, let's pick up and just read a few verses and talk about their import in regard to the Holy Ghost. Nephi is teaching us again. Let's start with 2 Nephi 31:13:

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I know that if ye shall follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism—yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water, according to his word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel."

That is an interesting verse. If you follow our Lord—and that is what he has talked about, how Christ kept the commandment, fulfilled all righteousness—if we follow our Lord down into the waters of baptism, we then receive the Holy Ghost, then experience the baptism of fire, he says.

What's that? Why is it called the baptism of fire? We hear that all the time; why is it a baptism of fire? The Holy Ghost is not only a revelator, which we just read about, but now we are learning he is a sanctifier and he cleanses and he purifies—that purification of the human soul, being referred to here as the baptism

of fire. And then he says, "Then can ye speak with the tongue of angels." When have you heard that last, when did you hear the tongue of angels?

Well, it seems to me that the concept of tongues is a very interesting one. As you know, the more dramatic illustration of the gift of tongues; it could be speaking the Adamic language. It could be, as is contained in the New Testament, the speaking in tongues, in the sense that you speak a known but foreign language (Acts 2). We are now introduced to a new concept. A related one, but a new one as to what it means to speak in tongues. It is to speak with the tongue of angels. Now, Nephi then takes a detour, a very valuable detour, from that subject, but comes back to it in the next chapter. Are you ready? Read for us now 2 Nephi 32. Why don't you read for us verses 2 and 3:

"Do ye not remember that I said unto you that after ye had received the Holy Ghost ye could speak with the tongue of angels? And now, how could ye speak with the tongue of angels save it were by the Holy Ghost?

"Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ. Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do."

Now, in verse 5 he tells us "the Holy Ghost will *show* unto you all things what ye should do." Now, what are we getting out of this? Verses 2 and 3. What does it mean, then, to speak with the tongue of angels? I was coming out of a priesthood meeting, General Priesthood meeting, six months ago, and I heard one of the elderly brethren say to a younger brother with him, "President Hinckley just spoke with the tongue of angels." What does that mean? I assume he was complimenting him. What was he saying?

*Student:* To me he was saying that President Hinckley was saying exactly what Christ would say. He was speaking the words of Christ.

Or, what an angel would say if he were present. Now, that sounds a little dramatic, doesn't it, but that is the principle. When people speak by the power of the Holy Ghost, they speak what the Lord would speak.

I remember at the October 1973 General Conference, President Harold B. Lee gave the opening address, and it was a powerful address called "Who Am I?" The next day President Romney opened the conference and gave a powerful witness of Christ's atonement. The next speaker was Elder Bruce R. McConkie. Elder McConkie said how touched he was by President Lee's remarks and President Romney's remarks, and he said, "And I had bear in upon me the idea that if the Lord had been here yesterday or today and had addressed the congregations, as these men did, he would have said just what they said." He was teaching that concept that when we speak by the power of the Holy Ghost we speak with the tongue of angels, we speak what the Lord or angels would speak if they were present. Now, that puts some responsibility upon the speaker, does it not?

Look over in Chapter 33. Here is another sort of attribute and power of the Holy Ghost that Nephi wants us to become aware of. Chapter 33:1:

"And now I, Nephi, cannot write all the things which were taught among my people; neither am I mighty in writing, like unto speaking; for when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men." There is the message of the spirit, the power, the duty of the Holy Ghost, to carry the message of truth to the hearts of others.

So we have learned about the Father, we've learned about the Son, we've learned about the Holy Ghost, and notice we've learned early, early in the ministry of the Book of Mormon.

Let's talk for a moment about the condescension of God. Where would I go to study that? Back to chapter 11 of 1 Nephi? Without reading the verses because of time constraints, I would suggest that Elder McConkie is on to something when he suggests to us that in this chapter we are introduced to two condescensions: the condescension of God the Father, and the condescension of God the Son.

In a talk that he delivered to BYU students in 1969 (the talk was entitled "Knowest Thou the Condescension of God?"), Elder McConkie said the following, "What then is the condescension of God? [He has just quoted at length from 1 Nephi 11.] As I understand the definition of condescension it is the act of descending to a lower and less dignified state, or waving the privileges of one's rank and status, of bestowing honors and favors upon one of lesser stature or status." What does the word seem to imply, *to condescend*? It is interesting because we don't use the word the same way today; it has become a pejorative term, have you noticed? If you are smarting off to me or talking down your nose, I might say, "Don't condescend to me." But what is Nephi taught about this when the spirit says, or the angel says, "Knowest thou the condescension of God?" What is he asking, what is the question? Do you know what?

*Student:* Do you understand how God has left his high station in order to come down to a place where he can relate with other human beings?

Yes, can you fathom the majesty of it all? That the Lord Jehovah, the God of the ancients, is going to come down. But first, again, in fact, the verses as I see them in 1 Nephi 11:16-25 seem to refer to the condescension of God the Father. On another occasion Elder McConkie, also speaking of this condescension concept, of the Father, said this (and I like the way he says this—all kinds of interesting things come up in our classes in the Church and elsewhere), "Without overstepping the bounds of propriety, by saying more than is appropriate, let us just say this: God, the Almighty, the maker and preserver and upholder of all things, the Omnipotent One; God, the Almighty who is infinite and eternal, elects in his fathomless wisdom

to beget a Son—an only Son—the Only Begotten in the flesh. God, who is infinite and immortal, condescends to step down from his throne to join with one who is finite and mortal, in bringing forth, after the manner of the flesh, the mortal Messiah.” Now that is the condescension of the Father. That is from the *Mortal Messiah*, Book 1, pp. 314-15.

The condescension of the Son—where might we find that in this chapter? Well, when it begins to speak of what Christ will do when he comes to earth, I would guess verses 26-36 essentially deal with the condescension of the Son:

“And the angel [in verse 26] said unto me again: Look and behold the condescension of God!

“And I looked and beheld the redeemer of the world, of whom my father had spoken; and I also beheld the prophet who should prepare the way before him.”

Notice what he sees. He sees the Lord coming down to earth, subjecting himself to mankind, being put to death, and so on. The condescension of God.

Maybe it was this same idea that drove the preaching in Mosiah 3. Notice in Mosiah 3; King Benjamin, has been instructed by an angel, and is either paraphrasing or quoting the words of the angel, in verse 5, Mosiah 3—this idea of the coming down of the great God. Would somebody like to read for us starting with 5?

“For behold, 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, and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases.

“And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men.

“And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.”

Why would he use the language, “hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer”? What is he trying to say here?

*Student:* That he is God.

That he is more than man; that he is God. Notice the same language down in verse 9: “Lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name; and even after all this they shall consider him a man.” Well, he is not just a man, that is the whole concept. This is the

coming down, the condescension of the great God.

The other thing I think is worth noting about this doctrine of condescension is that teaching it is costly. Now, early on in our story, without turning back to it, the earliest place we learn that it is costly is 1 Nephi 1. Why? Lehi gets run out of town over it, doesn't he? They want to kill him for two reasons: because he tells them that they need to repent, and because he told them of a coming of a Messiah. Who else can you think of got in trouble from teaching this? Abinadi. Look at Chapter 7 of Mosiah and look at the language that is used. As Limhi is speaking in Chapter 7, we are going to pick up about verse 26. Limhi is explaining what it cost Abinadi, and notice why it cost him. Verse 26:

"And a prophet of the Lord have they slain; yea, a chosen man of God, who told them of their wickedness and abominations, and prophesied of many things which are to come, yea, even the coming of Christ."

And notice he gets specific in this verse: "And because he said unto them that Christ was the God, the Father of all things, and said that he should take upon him the image of man, and it should be the image after which man was created in the beginning; or in other words, he said that man was created after the image of God, and that God should come down among the children of men, and take upon him flesh and blood, and go forth upon the face of the earth—

"And now, because he said this, they did put him to death."

See the concept coming through? It's costly—we find that it cost Zenos and Zenock as well.

Third concept, third major concept. One that I think we understand, but I want us to review it if we are talking about Godhead, and that is the role, of course, of Jesus Christ, as both Father and Son. Let's review quickly in our minds, without turning to too many scriptures, but among ourselves, the very helpful document that appeared on June 30, 1916 from the First Presidency and the Twelve, entitled "The Father and the Son."

Remember that the ways that we speak of Father include the following: (1) Elohim, the Father of our spirits; that is pretty plain, that is not a difficult thing to follow. (2) Jesus Christ, as Father—how? By creation. The Book of Mormon refers to him specifically as the "very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth and of all things which in them are." He is known as Father by creation. (3) Jesus Christ as Father by virtue of his role in bringing about the new birth, the Father of the rebirth, the Father of those who are born again into his Kingdom. Perhaps, the most famous statement of all—the 5th chapter of Mosiah, King Benjamin, "And now because of the covenant which ye have made, ye shall be called [what?]-the children of Christ."

The third is the difficult one. It is the divine investiture of authority. Now,



in that statement, that June 30, 1916 statement, the First Presidency speaks of Christ speaking with divine investiture of authority in the sense that the Father has put upon him his words and his name; that is to say, there are many places in scripture where Jesus speaks in the first person as though he were the Father. Now, a couple of interesting places in the Doctrine and Covenants illustrate this. I'd like us to turn to them and see if we can clarify.

First, Section 29. Let me show you an interesting phenomenon here. Section 29, turn to verse 1; is there any question as to who's talking here? "Listen to the voice of Jesus Christ, your Redeemer, the Great I Am." Now that is verse 1. Look over in verse 42 of the same section, section 29, verse 42: "Behold, I say unto you that I, the Lord God, gave unto Adam and unto his seed, that they should not die as to the temporal death, until I, the Lord God, should send forth angels to declare unto them repentance and redemption, through faith on the name of mine Only Begotten Son." He just changed persons in the same revelation, didn't he?

Let's take one more before we comment. Let's take section 49. Look at section 49; I think the first thing we want to see is verse 5. Now we'll do this in reverse order. Verse 5 of section 49: "Thus sayeth the Lord; for I am God, and have sent mine Only Begotten Son into the world." Who seems to be talking? Elohim; now we know it is the words of Elohim. Look at the last verse of the section, verse 28: "Behold, I am Jesus Christ, and I come quickly."

I remember teaching this to a Doctrine and Covenants class, showing it to the group, and asking this question, "What is going on here? Why would the Lord do this?" And there was just stillness in the class, just a dead silence, and I wasn't going to give the answer. And I waited, and I waited, and finally a hand went up in the back and a student said, "I think I know why the Lord is doing this." And I said, "Why?" He said, "To confuse us!" I think there must be another reason. How could you more graphically illustrate the oneness of the Father and the Son, than by having Christ speak as both of them in the same revelation? We go to great lengths to show that there is a Father and a Son, don't we? And that they are separate beings. But the fact is, they are infinitely more one than they are separate, though they happen to be separate persons.

Now, we introduce that idea, then, what we call Father by divine investiture of authority, in the sense that Christ speaks the words of the Father and has the name of the Father put upon him. Let me add one dimension to that, if I may be so bold, and I think it will help us make some sense of what is happening in the Book of Mormon. There is another sense in which Christ acts by divine investiture of authority. It is this, that the Father has put upon his Son, Jesus, his powers and his attributes. The powers and the attributes of the Father are conveyed to the Son in conception.

With that in mind then, Mosiah chapter 15; let's turn to that. Perhaps one of the more difficult passages in all the Book of Mormon, I think, makes a little more

sense. Mosiah chapter 15. It is very interesting to me that of all the people in the world Abinadi is teaching this really hairy and deep doctrine to Noah and his Priests! We're teaching this to known apostates!

"And now Abinadi said unto them [verse 1]: I would that ye should understand that God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people. [And we have already talked about that doctrine. What is it? The condescension—the coming of the great Jehovah.]

"And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son—

"The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son."

That's simple enough, isn't it? What's going on? Because he dwells in flesh—meaning what? Takes a physical body like every other daughter and son of God; he'll be called a son of God, the Son of God. But because he will inherit from his Father the powers of the spirit, the powers and the attributes of God, his Father, he will be known as the Father.

Notice what Abinadi is doing. He is playing on "flesh/Spirit," "man/God," "son/Father." Now we read how Nephi learned about the condescension of God; we read how Benjamin, as taught by the angel, taught the condescension of God; now look how Abinadi is teaching the condescension of God. He is saying something very fascinating. By the way, what is this chapter a commentary upon? The preceding chapter; and what is the preceding chapter? It is Isaiah 53, which is about what? The suffering servant, the Messiah. And the question is, how can he be God-Messiah, King-Ruler, and at the same time be suffering servant? Answer—he is God come to earth. And so what is he going to be? He is going to have flesh but he has the powers of the Spirit. Yes, he is man but he is God. He is son but we call him Father.

And notice verse 4 of Mosiah 15: "And *they* are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth." The temptation is to read that and assume what he means is that Elohim and Jehovah are one God. Well, that is true in the sense of one Godhead, but I don't think that is what he is trying to teach us. This is a discussion, not of the Godhead, but a discussion of the power of Christ, and the significance of Christ, and the role of Christ. In other words, I think what he is saying is, *they* are one God—meaning he is flesh, he is spirit, he is man, he is God, he is son, he is Father. They, those attributes, those powers, those titles, are blended wondrously into one being, Jesus Christ, the very Eternal Father of heaven and earth. Are you with me? This is a great declaration and testimony about the coming of the Messiah. This, in my mind, is not a discussion of the Godhead.

Comments, questions? And so the condescension of the great God. Let's draw this to a close by asking, what is it that the person should feel or know when he or she comes to the end of a reading of the Book of Mormon? I mean, it draws us

nearer to God through its power of the Spirit, it carries a spirit all its own, that's for sure. But what do I know about God when I have finished? Well, I know there is one. I know there is a Father, I know there is a Son, I know there is an act of atonement. I know there is a Holy Ghost that reveals the Father and the Son. I know there is a Holy Ghost that allows me, if I am worthy, to speak with a new tongue. I know there is a great God that has come down to earth. I mean, when we can see this, we sing the hymns with a little more reverence. "I marvel that he should descend from his throne divine." That hymn is teaching the condescension of the great God. The Book of Mormon, I would suggest to you, on the whole is a great invitation to know God. To know him as the Nephites knew him.

Let's go way back to the end of the Book of Mormon to the book of Ether. Ether chapter 12. This is a great testimony and invitation from Moroni. Ether chapter 12. We can't skip some important verses so would someone read for us? Let's start with about verse 38. These are so beautiful we can't skip these. Who wants to read them for us? 38-41, Ether chapter 12.

"And now I, Moroni, bid farewell unto the Gentiles, yea, and also unto my brethren whom I love, until we shall meet before the judgment-seat of Christ, where all men shall know that my garments are not spotted with your blood."

It is an interesting thing to consider that the four major record keepers—who are they? Nephi, Jacob, Mormon and Moroni—have some very interesting things in common. Every one of them saw our day and spoke of our day. Every one of them saw Christ; every one of them was ministered to by angels; and every one of them said, "I will meet you before the bar of God and you and I will talk about this." Nephi goes so far as to say, "And you that reject my words, I bid you everlasting farewell." Now, he bears a pretty strong testimony, Moroni does. This is a personal witness of Moroni now:

"And then shall ye know that I have seen Jesus, and that he hath talked with me face to face, and that he told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in mine own language, concerning these things;

"And only a few have I written, because of my weakness in writing."

Now here is the invitation: "And now, I would commend you to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written, that the grace of God the Father, and also the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of them, may be and abide in you forever. Amen."

That same idea comes through earlier. Do you remember, what was one of the great purposes of the Book of Mormon, to do what? To testify of what? To testify of Christ, and what is the language? That Jesus is the Christ, the eternal God. I don't think we would have much difficulty convincing some people in the world that Jesus is the Christ. We might have some difficulty convincing them that he is the eternal God, as the Book of Mormon sets him forth.



In that spirit let me just read you this. This is a wonderful testimony, and you don't need to turn to this, but in the 11th chapter of 2 Nephi, Nephi bears testimony this way:

"And my soul delighteth in proving unto my people that save Christ should come all men must perish.

"For if there be no Christ there be no God; and if there be no God we are not, for there could have been no creation. But there is a God, and he is Christ, and he cometh in the fulness of his own time."

That is a pretty powerful message. Of course, there is a Heavenly Father! Of course, Christ worshipped the Father! But the Book of Mormon's central witness is that Jesus is the Christ, *The Eternal God*. Of that I bear testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.