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John W. Welch

Ten Testimonies of Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon

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Summary

One of the most important functions of the Book of Mormon is to convey to the modern world powerful testimonies of the divine mission and essential attributes of Jesus Christ. Many Book of Mormon prophets knew Jesus personally; therefore, their teachings and testimonies about him are based on firsthand knowledge and acquaintance. John Welch discusses ten of the prophets who testified of Christ.

Transcript
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John W. Welch (J.D., Duke University Law School) is the Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law at the J. Reuben Clark Law School, Brigham Young University. He is also Editor-in-Chief of *BYU Studies* and is the founder of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) at Brigham Young University. Professor Welch is a member of the Board of Trustees of FARMS.

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TEN TESTIMONIES OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE BOOK OF MORMON

John W. Welch

One of the most important functions of the Book of Mormon, Another Testament of Jesus Christ, is to convey to the modern world powerful testimonies of the divine mission and essential attributes of Jesus Christ, "to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God" (Title Page). The Book of Mormon is a convincing witness for Jesus Christ because its writers freely shared their personal testimonies of him and communicated their individual feelings and thoughts about his attributes and functions. By examining and comparing the many personal testimonies of Jesus Christ that are found in the Book of Mormon, we can see that they are both similar and different: While agreeing in their basic truths and doctrines, they differ in their emphasis and style. Most interestingly, the attributes of Jesus Christ emphasized by the various prophets in the Nephite records are often the attributes with which each prophet especially identified because of his own personal spiritual experiences, callings, and individual circumstances.¹

Jesus was personally known to many Book of Mormon prophets, for he appeared to several, including Lehi (1 Nephi 1:9), Nephi (2 Nephi 11:2), Jacob (2 Nephi 2:4; 11:3), Mormon (Mormon 1:15), the brother of Jared (Ether 3:14), and Moroni (Ether 12:39), as well as to the multitude in 3 Nephi. Others like Benjamin, Alma, Amulek, and Samuel the Lamanite saw "the angel of the Lord" (Mosiah 4:1; 27:11; Alma 10:7; Helaman 13:7), which may be a euphemism for seeing the Lord himself (for example, it is difficult to distinguish between "the angel of the Lord" and Jehovah in Genesis 16:7-11; 22:11-15; Exodus 3:2; and Judges 2:1-4).² Thus, their teachings and testimonies about Jesus are based on firsthand knowledge and acquaintance.

All Book of Mormon prophets taught "more or less" (Mosiah 13:33; cf. Jacob 4:5) the same "word" of belief in Jesus Christ.³ In visions, public speeches, and personal statements they typically declared (1) that Jesus is the Son of God, (2) who would come down to earth to live as a

mortal, (3) to heal the sick, cast out devils, and suffer physically and spiritually, (4) to take upon himself the sins of the world and redeem his people, (5) to be put to death by crucifixion and rise from the dead, (6) to bring to pass the resurrection of all mankind, (7) to judge all people in the last day according to their works.

For example, when Alma invited the Zoramite poor to plant that seed of faith in their hearts, the specific "word" that he wanted them to plant (see Alma 33:23) appears to epitomize the basic Nephite testimony embracing these seven points. Alma urged the people to:

[1] Believe in the Son of God, [2] that he will come to redeem his people, and [3] that he shall suffer and die [4] to atone for their sins; and [5] that he shall rise again from the dead, [6] which shall bring to pass the resurrection, [7] that all men shall stand before him to be judged at the last and judgment day, according to their works. [Alma 33:22]

The prophets of the Book of Mormon regularly referred to these points when they testified of Christ. Accordingly, on another occasion, Alma essentially rehearsed the same seven points in the city of Gideon and expressly identified them as the "testimony in me" (Alma 7:13). Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that Alma's "word" of faith in Christ represented a standard Nephite testimony that was regularly used in Alma's day.

No doubt these points of testimony were distilled from the words of the Nephite prophets who had preceded Alma. All seven elements can be found scattered throughout the writings of Nephi (1 Nephi 11:31-33; 19:9-10; 2 Nephi 25:12-13), Jacob (2 Nephi 9:5-15), Abinadi (Mosiah 15:5-9), and Benjamin (Mosiah 3:5-10). It appears that Alma molded them into a concise statement of belief that was especially useful in the newly-established churches in the land of Zarahemla over which he presided. This observation is corroborated by the fact that Amulek's testimony is quite similar to Alma's:

Yea, [1] he is the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth, and all things which in them are; he is the beginning and the end, the first and the last; and [2] he shall come into the world to redeem his people; and [4] he shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name; and these are they that shall have eternal life, and salvation cometh to

none else. Therefore the wicked remain as though there had been no redemption made, except it be the loosing of the bands of death; for behold, [6] the day cometh that all shall rise from the dead and stand before God, and [7] be judged according to their works. [Alma 11:39-41]

This basic pattern persisted to the end of Nephite civilization, as is reflected in one of Moroni's last testimonies of Christ:

And because of the fall of man [2] came Jesus Christ, [1] even the Father and the Son; and [4] because of Jesus Christ came the redemption of man. And because of the redemption of man, which came by Jesus Christ, they are brought back into the presence of the Lord; yea, this is wherein all men are redeemed, [3] because the death of Christ [6] bringeth to pass the resurrection, which bringeth to pass a redemption from an endless sleep, from which sleep all men shall be awakened by the power of God when the trump shall sound; and they shall come forth, both small and great, and [7] all shall stand before his bar, being redeemed and loosed from this eternal band of death, which death is a temporal death. And then cometh the judgment of the Holy One upon them. [Mormon 9:12-14]

Building upon this foundational testimony of Christ, each Book of Mormon prophet distinctively accented certain attributes of Jesus Christ. Judging simply from the names and titles that they used in referring to the Lord, we can see that each Book of Mormon prophet related to and testified of Jesus in his own personal ways, revealing to us things about Jesus Christ and also about the prophets who knew him.

It should not surprise us to find that Jesus Christ meant (and means) different things to different people based on their personal circumstances and perspectives. As is well-known, the New Testament testimonies of Christ reflect a variety of views about Jesus. No single account is likely to do justice even to a small portion of what Jesus said, did, was, is, and will be. To each of us, Christ is both the same and different. He is the same eternal God who came down to earth to atone for the sins of all mankind and to make the resurrection possible, but he is also ever new and different, since our own experiences cause us to emphasize and cherish different things about him, even at different times in our lives.

The testimonies of Jesus in the Book of Mormon follow this same true-to-life reality.

Distinct personal profiles emerge when the words of the various Book of Mormon prophets are identified and compared. Moreover, in many cases, the attributes and functions of Jesus Christ emphasized by each Book of Mormon prophet correspond closely with the personal circumstances and experiences of each of the prophets, as the following materials show.⁴

1. Lehi. From the visions and revelations he received, Lehi knew the tender mercies of the promised Messiah. The surviving words of Lehi contain some fifteen different titles that refer to this God, the One he saw descending out of the midst of heaven (1 Nephi 1:9). Except for five common Israelite terms infrequently used by Lehi ("God," "Lórd," "Lord God Almighty," "Holy One," and "Holy One of Israel"), all of Lehi's designations cluster around the redemptive and mediating functions of this Messiah.

Lehi most often calls him "a Messiah," "the Messiah," "the true Messiah," "the holy Messiah," "this Redeemer," "their Redeemer," or "thy Redeemer." In addition Lehi learned from the angel that this Redeemer would be called "the Lamb of God." Lehi's messianic terminology manifests greater variation than that of any other Book of Mormon prophet, and Lehi is the only one ever to call the Lord "a Savior" (1 Nephi 10:4), "a prophet" (1 Nephi 10:4), "the great Mediator" (2 Nephi 2:27, 28), or "first-fruits unto God" (2 Nephi 2:9).

These points take on added meaning in the context of Lehi's personal experiences. To Lehi, who fled from Jerusalem and the lands of his inheritance, the Messiah would be, above all, a Messiah and a Redeemer who would come to restore the fallen, the lost, and the displaced. He would restore them to the lands of their inheritance. He alone is seen as the "great Mediator" who makes it possible for all people to choose between good and evil (2 Nephi 2:26-28) and thereby be redeemed and live again.

Lehi emphasized God's mercy to all mankind (1 Nephi 1:14). Of all Book of Mormon prophets, he spoke especially of the "multitude of his tender mercies" (1 Nephi 8:8: cf. 1:20), of his

"infinite goodness" (2 Nephi 1:10), and of the "arms of his love" (2 Nephi 1:15). This goes hand-in-hand with the fact that Lehi had prayed mightily and wept bitterly over the wickedness of his people and the stubbornness of his eldest sons. But he never gave up hope. He remained extraordinarily patient, loving, and merciful toward his neighbors who had violently rejected him, and toward Laman and Lemuel even after he knew that they would never partake of the fruit of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8:37) and had conspired to kill him (1 Nephi 17:44).

Lehi's orientation toward the Redeemer was markedly universal. Since he had read plainly in the heavenly book "of the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of *the world*" (1 Nephi 1:19, emphasis added), Lehi knew that God would redeem not only a lost and fallen Israel, but the entire world—certainly a bold and unpopular doctrine in most Jewish circles in Lehi's day. Lehi spoke emphatically about the Messiah who would come to redeem "all mankind" (1 Nephi 10:6), "all men" (2 Nephi 1:10; 2:27), and make intercession "for all the children of men" (2 Nephi 2:9-10).

Unlike most other Book of Mormon prophets (who also served as kings, judges, and military leaders), Lehi was exclusively a prophet. He stood firmly in the tradition of Israelite prophecy. Hence Lehi was readily and uniquely inclined to identify Jesus as "a prophet" (1 Nephi 10:4; cf. Deuteronomy 18:15, "God will raise up unto thee a Prophet" like unto Moses), and to make special mention of the fact that another prophet would prepare the way of the Lord before his coming (1 Nephi 10:8; cf. Isaiah 40:3). Lehi's strong Israelite roots are also apparent in his reference to the Lord as the "first-fruits" that typically belonged to God.⁵

Lehi knew many things about the coming Messiah, but not everything. The name of Christ, for example, was apparently first revealed to Jacob after Lehi's death (2 Nephi 10:3), and it was Nephi who first disclosed later yet that the Messiah's "name shall be Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (2 Nephi 25:19).⁶

2. Nephi. Nephi followed his father in using the names of Messiah, Redeemer, and Savior, but he introduced several other terms and concepts as he sought and obtained greater understanding of his father's visions. The names that Nephi used for Christ reflect this elaboration.

Most notable among these names are those that reflect the sonship of Christ. On twenty occasions, Nephi identified Jesus either as "the Son of God," "the only begotten Son," "the only begotten of the Father," "the Son of the everlasting God," "the Son of the Eternal Father," "the Son of the Living God," "the Son of the Most High God," "the Son of Righteousness," "the Son," or the "beloved Son." Only Alma the Younger begins to approach this wide variety of filial designations for Jesus used by Nephi. This may somehow subtly reflect the fact that both Nephi and Alma had deep and significant relationships with their fathers: Nephi strived to know exactly the things that his father had seen (1 Nephi 14:29) and to be a righteous successor to Lehi; Alma spent the years after his conversion remembering the bondage and deliverance of his father and labored "without ceasing" to undo the damage he had done as a young man to his father's ministry (Alma 36:24, 29).

Nephi (who himself knew what it meant to be persecuted for righteousness' sake, both by those at Jerusalem and by his own brothers) referred sixty times in his writings to Jesus Christ as "the Lamb" or "the Lamb of God" (as the angel called him), befitting the divine offering of his sacrifice.⁷ After Nephi's time, however, the phrase "Lamb of God" rarely appears in the Book of Mormon (perhaps sheep were less common in the New World).

For years, Nephi tried to teach his brothers and his people to walk in the paths of obedience. Nephi and his brother Jacob also experienced the harrowing episodes of being led through an uncharted desert and across an endless expanse of ocean by the Liahona. From these experiences Nephi knew the necessity of staying on the Lord's straight and narrow path. For Nephi and Jacob, the images of Christ as the keeper of the only gate that leads to eternal life (2 Nephi 9:41; 33:9) and as the example that people must follow (2 Nephi 31:10) were distinctively vivid metaphors.

Likewise, as ruler and teacher of his people, Nephi emphasized the rulership of Christ, the only true God who would ever come. Nephi particularly saw Christ as the ultimate source of life and law, the only one in whom the law would be fulfilled (2 Nephi 25:16-18, 25-27).

3. Jacob. Jacob was called as a young man to serve the Lord as a priest: Lehi set him apart and blessed him to spend all his days in God's service (2 Nephi 2:3), and Nephi consecrated him to be a priest (2 Nephi 5:26). Jacob officiated in delivering the great covenant speech around the time of Nephi's coronation (see 2 Nephi 6-10); he spoke to his people from the temple (Jacob 2-4); and he and his lineage had the sacred obligation of keeping the religious records on the small plates of Nephi. To a remarkable degree, Jacob's priestly functions are reflected in the testimony that he bears of Christ.

As mentioned above, Jacob introduced the word *Christ* (or its Hebrew equivalent) into broad Nephite usage. That word in Greek or Hebrew derives from a word whose meanings include "anointed." To the extent that he himself was a "consecrated" priest, who both proclaimed the eternal gospel of Christ and performed atoning sacrifices in the temple of Nephi pursuant to the law of Moses (2 Nephi 5:10, 16), Jacob would have identified personally with the fact that Jesus was anointed to perform his holy and eternal atoning mission.

Indeed, Jacob is the first in the Book of Mormon to expound on the atonement of Christ. He told how Christ would suffer and die for all mankind so they might become subject to him through his "infinite atonement," which overcomes the Fall and brings resurrection and incorruptibility (2 Nephi 9:5-14). He spoke repeatedly of such things as uncleanness, guilt, robes (2 Nephi 9:14), flesh being consumed by fire (2 Nephi 9:16), shaking one's garments (2 Nephi 9:44), and fatness (2 Nephi 9:51). Whatever else these words might mean, they evoke priestly images of temple sacrifice and ritual (for example, the forbidden fat belonged to the Lord; see Leviticus 7:3-31). Jacob thus saw Christ in connection with traditional atonement imagery drawn

from Israelite temple practices.

Jacob also saw fit to refer to Christ as the "great Creator" (three times; 2 Nephi 9:5, 6; Jacob 3:7), "the all-powerful Creator" (Jacob 2:5), and the "Maker" (twice; 2 Nephi 9:40; Jacob 2:6). He has more to say about Christ as creator than any other Book of Mormon prophet, and in this connection it is significant that the creation account was an integral part of typical ancient temple worship.⁸

The purpose of temple sacrifice in ancient Israel was to purify the people. The objective of their temple service was to become "holy men unto me" (Exodus 22:31), "for I the Lord, which sanctify you, am holy" (Leviticus 21:8). Indeed the main body of laws of priestly sacrifice in Israel came to be known as the Holiness Code. This is consistent with the fact that Jacob, of all Book of Mormon prophets, strongly prefers to call Christ "the Holy One of Israel" (seventeen times) or simply "the Holy One" (once). Jacob is also the only one to call him "the Holy One of *Jacob*." Lehi and Nephi account for the other fourteen times the designation "Holy One of Israel" appears; but after the time of the small plates this title drops out of Nephite usage—perhaps because the temple-service declined in prominence as people knew that its sacrifices merely typified the only meaningful sacrifice of Christ, or perhaps because the Nephites, over time, became less inclined to identify personally with a remote and now unfamiliar land of Israel.

Jacob also designated Christ the "King of Heaven" (2 Nephi 10:14; cf. Isaiah 6:5). Coming around the time of Nephi's coronation, this reference stands as a solemn reminder of Nephi's reluctance to become king (2 Nephi 5:18), for God is truly the only king in Israel. From the fact that immoral lawbreakers were not punished by the kings, I infer that Jacob was at odds with the kings and the rising aristocracy in the city of Nephi much of his life (Jacob 1:15-17), and thus we may see an indication of anti-monarchical leanings in his eagerness to recognize Christ as King. The only other Book of Mormon prophet to call Jesus "the King of heaven" was Alma in his speech

delivered in the city of Zarahemla (Alma 5:50); as the first chief judge in that city where kings had ruled for many generations and in which kingmen would fight for several ensuing decades to reinstate the institution of kingship, Alma had his own reasons, much like Jacob's, for promoting the idea that Jesus alone was King.

4. Abinadi. Abinadi stands out as a lone prophetic voice, singularly and courageously decrying the perversions of King Noah and his priests. After spending two years as a fugitive, Abinadi returned to the city of Nephi by himself to deliver his prophetic warnings and condemnations. He was alone in his preaching, alone in his tenacious rebuttal against Noah's court, and alone in the flames of martyrdom. He suffered, an innocent victim, who had done no evil, although four different legal allegations were leveled against him.⁹

The attributes of Christ featured by Abinadi correlate readily with these personal experiences of Abinadi. Primarily, Abinadi depicted Christ as one who would innocently suffer, alone, to redeem his people. Three times Abinadi emphatically asserted that God himself would bear the iniquities of His people: "Were it not for the atonement which God *himself* shall make" (Mosiah 13:28); "God *himself* should come down among the children of men" (Mosiah 13:34); "God *himself* shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people" (Mosiah 15:1). This major point of emphasis for Abinadi was also a new formulation. No other Book of Mormon prophet before Abinadi had used these exact words (and only Alma does so after him; see Alma 42:15). So unequivocal was Abinadi's formulation that the priests of Noah found it the basis of their blasphemy charge: "For thou hast said that God *himself* should come down among the children of men" (Mosiah 17:8). Just as Abinadi himself went down alone into the pit of certain martyrdom that awaited him in Noah's court, so God himself would come into the world.

Except for Alma's attempt, no defenders or companions came forward to assist or rescue Abinadi. Likewise, Abinadi made no mention of any apostles, disciples, or others who might come

to the aid of the suffering Messiah. Indeed, little room is left for God the Father to figure into Abinadi's soteriology. Abinadi strongly emphasized the fatherhood and sonship of Christ, seeing Christ as the "very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth" (Mosiah 15:4). Interestingly, the words of Abinadi contain the word "Father" exactly eight times, "Son" eight times, and "Christ" eight times, as if to signal Christ's fatherhood and sonship equally. While God the Father is clearly present in Abinadi's theology,¹⁰ the realities of Christ's atonement were such that in the final hour God the Father was effectively not there, for Jesus had to bear the suffering alone. Perhaps to emphasize the loneliness of that task, Abinadi saw Christ both 'as Father and Son: the atonement was not to be a team effort.

The dominant feature of Abinadi's teaching is about the redemption and that it will come through suffering (the words "redeem" or "redemption" appear nineteen times in Abinadi's words). Despite God's mighty power, he himself will be "oppressed" and "afflicted" (Mosiah 13:35). Abinadi drew these words from the prophecies of Isaiah that the servant will be "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; . . . afflicted, . . . wounded for our transgressions, . . . oppressed, and he was afflicted" (Isaiah 53:3-7; Mosiah 14:3-7). As Isaiah prophesied, "he hath poured out his soul unto death" (Isaiah 53:12; Mosiah 14:12), and "so he shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death" (Mosiah 15:7). Of all Book of Mormon prophets, Abinadi was similarly called upon to surrender his will to God, even unto death by fire.

Abinadi used noticeably simple nomenclature for Christ: he called him "the Messiah" (once), "Christ," "Father," "Son," and all the rest simply "Lord." There is no literary embellishment or flourish in Abinadi's speech. This enhances the simplicity and directness of his message, and it also implements the plainness of Isaiah's vision: "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2; Mosiah 14:2).

Similarly, no artifice or adornment, no tendency toward the ornate embellishments of Noah's edifices, were suited to the plain and forthright style of the prophet Abinadi.

5. Benjamin. Around 124 B.C., King Benjamin received from the angel of the Lord a succinct explanation of the atoning mission of Christ (Mosiah 3:2-27). Those words became the centerpiece of Benjamin's speech, during which he announced to his people that his son Mosiah was their new king (Mosiah 1:10; 2:30) and gave the people a new name that distinguished them above all people (Mosiah 1:11).

On a day when the newly appointed king normally received his new coronation name and titles, Benjamin solemnly disclosed for the first time an extended name of Jesus Christ and gave it to the entire multitude by way of covenant. The new name testified that the Savior would be called "Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning" (Mosiah 3:8). The people's use of this name in their response (Mosiah 4:2) and its subsequent reappearance in the record (Helaman 14:12) suggest that this extended name had sacred, perhaps ceremonial significance among the Nephites.¹¹

Benjamin's speech, which was delivered at the temple in Zarahemla where blood sacrifices were routinely performed under the law of Moses (Mosiah 2:3), emphasized more than any other aspect of Christ's ministry the atoning functions of his blood. Four times, Benjamin mentioned the "blood" of Christ in connection with the atonement (Mosiah 3:11, 15, 16, 18), and the people answered him saying, "Apply the atoning blood of Christ" (Mosiah 4:2). Other Book of Mormon prophets had previously spoken and would later speak of having their garments washed white in the blood of the Lamb, but no prophet gave such clear information about the atoning work of Christ's blood itself or placed such central attention on the fact that Christ's blood actually would be spilt. Benjamin alone described Jesus' bloody sweat coming from every pore in anguish for his people (Mosiah 3:7).¹² Interestingly, Benjamin linked the atoning blood of Christ with the full range of

atonement concepts under the law of Moses; he assured the people that Christ's blood atones for the sins of all those who humble themselves and repent, and for the sins of those "who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned" (Mosiah 3:11). The need under the law of Moses to atone even for sins committed in ignorance is stated in Numbers 15:27-29, and such iniquities were of particular interest on the Day of Atonement when the scapegoat carried away "all their iniquities" (Leviticus 16:22).

Indeed, so holy was the Day of Atonement in the Jewish tradition that on this day—and on this day alone—could the name of God, YHWH, be pronounced. Exactly ten times during the traditional Yom Kippur service in Israel would the priest utter this name out loud, and each time upon hearing the name the Israelites would fall prostrate to the ground.¹³ Thus it is noteworthy that in Benjamin's speech, the exalted name Lord God appears ten times (five as "Lord God," four as "Lord God Omnipotent," and one as "Lord Omnipotent"). Seven of these utterances are in the words of the angel to Benjamin (Mosiah 3:5, 13, 14, 17, 18, 21, 23); the other three are in the words of Benjamin (Mosiah 2:30, 41; 5:15), occurring at important ceremonial breaking points in the speech.

In addition to the atoning dimensions of Christ's blood that were of special notice to Benjamin, the Lord's kingship was prominent in Benjamin's testimony of Jesus. This is not surprising, since Benjamin was a strong, benevolent king. Benjamin referred favorably to the Lord as the "heavenly King" who was righteously represented by the earthly king (Mosiah 2:19) and uniquely spoke five times of the Lord's "omnipotence" (Mosiah 3:5, 17, 18, 21; 5:15). Consistent with Benjamin's personal interests and circumstances in life, he was the only Book of Mormon writer ever to use the word "omnipotent."

6. Alma the Younger. Alma, the judicial and religious defender of the freedom of belief (c. 100—73 B.C.), taught faith in Jesus Christ, the master of personal conversion. Alma had tasted the

transforming joy that came when he called upon the name of Jesus Christ for mercy (Alma 36:18; cf. Mosiah 27); and in his subsequent sermons Alma described how the "image of God" might be "engraven upon your countenances" (Alma 5:19), and how the word of Christ is to be planted in each convert's soul, where if nourished it would spring up as an everlasting tree of life (Alma 32:40; 33:22—23). Indelibly changed by his own overwhelmingly joyous conversion and rescue as he stood at the brink of God's destroying judgment, Alma personally knew the mercy of God (which he mentions over sixteen times), of the deliverance of God (mentioned over twelve times), of God's "plan of redemption" (mentioned eight times), of the joy of conversion (over twenty times), and of the inevitability that God will judge all people (over ten times).

As chief judge, Alma was particularly interested in God's justice. He gave the only discourse on God's restoring justice and mercy (Alma 41-42), as well as the most complete description of the evidence that the divine judge will assess in making that judgment: "Our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us" (Alma 12:14). Alma was also the only writer in scripture to attribute to God the quality of "equity" (three times; Alma 9:26; 10:21; 13:9).

After leaving his political, judicial, and military posts at the head of the Nephite state, Alma devoted himself to testifying of Christ. Alma found that only by bearing down with "pure testimony" could he hope to "pull down, by the word of God, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people" (Alma 4:19). Alma tried to appeal to all segments of Nephite society—to the faithful in Gideon, to the apostates in Ammonihah, to the inconstant in Zarahemla, and to the poor in Antionum—and his use of terminology reflects this broad orientation. Alma used a wide range of all types of names for Christ: names that speak of Jesus Christ christologically, personally, or redemptively; phrases that reflect his sonship, divinity, rulership, and deliverances of Israel; titles that acknowledge him as the Creator who remembers all his creations

and as the good Shepherd who leads his people.

The only category of names that Alma seems to have avoided are names that speak of Jesus' "fatherhood." Perhaps Alma avoided such references because the traditional Nephite designation of Jesus as "the Father of *heaven and earth*" (2 Nephi 25:12, emphasis added; i.e. the Creator; see Mosiah 3:8; Alma 11:39; Helaman 14:12; 16:18; cf. 1 Nephi 22:9) had been made a subject of manipulation and rhetorical controversy by Alma's opponents (Alma 11:38).

7. Amulek. Amulek, one of Alma the Younger's most celebrated converts, was a wealthy man who had acquired prestige and riches by his own industry! He was the master of a large household (Alma 10:11), and after his conversion he was proud of his illustrious Nephite lineage (Alma 10:3-4). He was evidently quite literate, perhaps providing many of the books (which would have been costly) that were burned when the women and children of the faithful were incinerated in Ammonihah. I assume that some of Amulek's own women and children (Alma 10:11) were among those who "were taught to believe in the word of God" and who were accordingly martyred (Alma 14:8); and he was undoubtedly a close friend of many of the other martyrs and of the men with whom he was cast out.¹⁴ Amulek saw the awful annihilation of the apostate city of Ammonihah, and he lost all of his valuable earthly possessions as the city was destroyed by the sword, burnt by fire, and reduced to a heap (cf. Deuteronomy 13:16).

Notwithstanding these developments, and perhaps because of them, Amulek turned more ardently than any other Book of Mormon prophet to superlative descriptions of the infinite scope of the atonement of Jesus Christ. Nothing else would ever be commensurate with the "great and last sacrifice" that would be "infinite and eternal." No form of human revenge or avenging would ever bring back the lives that were lost in the atrocity of Ammonihah.

Amulek's testimony of Christ shines in the light of his background and experiences. He is the only one to ever refer to the atonement of Jesus Christ as the "great and last sacrifice" (five

times). For Amulek it is the magnitude of the atonement that is impressive. Not once does he mention the suffering of Christ, for mortal suffering no matter how extreme is still of finite duration. Amulek, therefore, made no attempt to explain or depict the mechanics of the great, last, infinite, and eternal sacrifice to "atone for the sins of the world" (Alma 34:8; see also 11:40). To Amulek, who himself had been exposed to terrible risks of harm and torture, it was especially pertinent to describe the atonement as encircling people "in the arms of *safety*" (Alma 34:16), a phrase unique to him in all of scripture.

Coming unto Christ, in Amulek's admonition, requires' faith and patience (Alma 34:3). Amulek had learned patience, suffering many days in prison in Ammonihah. He also emphasized the urgency of repentance, singularly urging people not to procrastinate the day of their repentance (Alma 34:35), for he had seen the fate of his fellow citizens in Ammonihah who had failed to repent in time. When Amulek spoke of the certainty that the unrepentant "must unavoidably perish" (Alma 34:9) and will face "that awful crisis" (Alma 34:34), for God will not dwell "in unholy temples" (Alma 34:36), he testified from spiritual knowledge and actual experience.

Having seen the consequences of excessive greed and materialism, it is also not surprising that Amulek, formerly a very wealthy man, would tell even the poorest of the Zoramites that if they want God to have mercy on them and to hear their prayers, they must not "turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have any, to those who stand in need" (Alma 34:28). Amulek is the only person in scripture to ever use the word "charitable" (Alma 34:29). He knows that without repentance and charity "all are hardened, . . . and must perish except it be through the atonement which it is expedient should be made" (Alma 34:9, 29).

Amulek's favorite and most distinctive name of Christ is "the Son," or "the Son of God" (eight occurrences). He also used the name "Christ" (eight times), "the Lamb" (once) and "the very

eternal Father of heaven and of earth, and all things which in them are" (once, Alma 11:39). But above all, for Amulek, Jesus was "the Son of God." Depicting Christ in his familial relationship with the Father may have been especially tender to Amulek, to whom lineage and family was especially sensitive and important, and whose own sons may have been among those children who perished in the fire in Ammonihah.

8. Samuel the Lamanite. About 30 B.C., many Lamanites were converted to Christ when the walls of a prison were destroyed and God's light shone and his voice spoke out of an enveloping cloud of darkness (Helaman 5:33-43). In the twenty-fifth year later, an important Lamanite prophet named Samuel appeared on the walls of Zarahemla and foretold that even more significant signs of light would appear at the time of Jesus' birth and that massive destructions and darkness would be seen at his death (Helaman 14:2-27). It is unknown whether Samuel had been present to witness in person the awesome manifestation of God's power when the prison walls had collapsed and the faces of Nephi and Lehi had shone out of the darkness and the voice of God had spoken from heaven; but even if he only knew those events secondhand, they were powerful events in the collective lives of the Lamanites, who knew from this experience that God could easily do the same again to the wicked at the time of his crucifixion. Accordingly, the thrust of Samuel's prophecies of destruction and darkness were vivified by the earlier events at the prison destroyed by God in the land of Nephi.

Consistent with his prediction of cursed destruction for the wicked, Samuel was one of the few Book of Mormon prophets to call Jesus the "Lord of Hosts." Outside of numerous Book of Mormon occurrences of this phrase in passages that are quoted from Isaiah and Malachi, only Nephi, Jacob, and Samuel used this title. They usually did so in condemning or cursing the wicked. "A curse shall come upon the land, saith the Lord of Hosts; . . . then shall ye weep and howl in that day, saith the Lord of Hosts" (Helaman 13:17, 32). This title speaks of the Lord as the head of the hosts (soldiers). "This name certainly contains the affirmation that Yahweh is the true head of

Israel's armies, . . . it [also] affirms his universal rulership that encompasses every force or army, heavenly, cosmic and earthly."¹⁵ Thus Samuel, who dominantly spoke of Jesus Christ in his role as a warrior engaged in mortal conflict with the forces of evil, also uniquely referred to him as the "great and Eternal Head" (Helaman 13:38).

9. Mormon. In addition to being a prophet, Mormon was a father, commander-in-chief of the Nephite armies, recordkeeper and abridger. He was an extremely young appointee, being charged with the keeping of records at the age of ten and the commanding the armies at the age of sixteen. He learned by sad experience that his direct action had failed. His personal leadership was unsuccessful, because of the awful conditions of the Nephites at his time. Mormon chose to withdraw and to work indirectly, as an "idle witness" and as a recordkeeper, hoping that by preserving the word of God he might indirectly teach and do some good.

Perhaps consistent with these experiences, Mormon's testimony of Christ is most often an indirect one. He used the term "Christ" thirty-three times; all but seven of these are found in prepositional phrases, such as "the light of Christ," "alive in Christ," "the gift of Christ," "the atonement of Christ," "the words of Christ," etc. Mormon seems to focus more on the indirect manifestations and attributes of Christ than on the person of Christ himself. When he used the name "Jesus Christ," a favorite expression with his son Moroni, Mormon uniformly augmented the personal name of Jesus Christ with the more formal title "Lord Jesus Christ" (Moroni 7:2; 8:2; 9:26). Once in 3 Nephi 5, Mormon spoke of Jesus as the Redeemer and Savior, in connection with the redemption of the promised land of the Israelites (3 Nephi 5:20, 26); but otherwise, names and titles for Jesus are almost non-existent in Mormon's personal writings.

Mormon had a great love for very small children, perhaps owing in part to the fact that he was recognized as a chosen and worthy child at a very young age. Thus he alone referred to Jesus as "the Holy Child, Jesus" (Moroni 8:3) and saw the redemption of Christ most powerfully

efficacious in the salvation of little children (Moroni 8:8).

10. Moroni. It is hard to imagine that Moroni's life circumstances were very pleasant. His young childhood saw the inexorable deterioration of society around him and his family. His father, Mormon, must have spent most of his time tediously preparing what he knew would be the final testimony of his collapsing world. Moroni's young manhood was spent in war, as he led a division of ten thousand into a hopeless slaughter. His last thirty-six years were spent wandering, alone and hunted like an animal for his refusal to deny Christ. He was the keeper of the words of Christ and the preserver of the most sacred prayers of Jesus, which Moroni only included in the record after he knew that those words would be safe from the hands of apostates and infidels. During those lonely years of wandering, Jesus Christ appeared to Moroni in plain humility, speaking with him face to face in Moroni's own language (Ether 12:39).

Moroni's testimony of Christ, like the testimonies of his predecessors, mirrors the conditions that surrounded him. He saw the only good in the world existing in Christ; he affirmed that all that is good does not deny Christ (Moroni 10:6), just as he had staunchly refused to deny Christ even at the peril of his life. Moroni repeatedly beckoned his readers to come unto Christ and deny ungodliness, which was rampant in the world that Moroni had known. By contrast, holiness was a main attribute of Christ mentioned by Moroni (Mormon 9:3, 4, 5), Jesus being identified as a "holy Being" (Mormon 9:3) and as the "Holy One" (Mormon 9:14).

Moroni used very few titles for Christ reflecting Jesus' position or official station (such as "Lord," or "Lord God," or "Father of heaven and earth," etc.). Moroni's texts never use such titles as "Redeemer," or "Savior," and they scantily mention such words as "Lord," "Father and Son," or "Lamb." More distinctly than any other Book of Mormon writer, Moroni used the two-part name of "Jesus Christ" (16 times), the name that figures especially in the sacrament prayers and priesthood ordinances which Moroni treasured and preserved. Moreover, Moroni showed his personal

acquaintance with Jesus, calling him by the simple name of "Jesus" alone (eight times), far more than any other Book of Mormon prophet. This intimacy bespeaks the fact that Moroni had indeed walked many years with Jesus as his only companion, evidently on a first-name basis.

Moroni's last exhortations were for people to come unto Christ and be perfected (or finished) in him (Moroni 10:32-33). As the finisher of the Nephite records, Moroni identified clearly with the role of Christ as the finisher of human righteousness. "Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, . . . that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ" (Moroni 10:32).

Finally, Moroni concluded the plates of Mormon, looking forward to the time when all people will meet him "before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the eternal judge of both the quick and dead" (Moroni 10:34). This is the only text in which a Book of Mormon prophet used the name "Jehovah."¹⁶ Assuming that the word "Jehovah" in Moroni 10:34 is a literal translation of the ancient Hebrew tetragrammaton (the protected holy name of God), it appears that he finally felt safe in writing this name as a concluding seal, knowing that no one else in his lifetime would see the record and, reading it, would ever misuse that sacred name.

Concluding Observations. Through the spiritual experiences of its writers—many of whom were eye witnesses of Christ's glory—we can see that the Book of Mormon communicates clear, personal knowledge of Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon is an intimate scripture: Its purpose is to bring individuals to Christ. It exhorts each reader, personally, "to come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift" (Moroni 10:30). Individual readers can identify vividly with the testimonies of Christ found in the Book of Mormon largely because those testimonies themselves are projections of eternal realities through the personal lenses of noble characters.

Arising out of the ten testimonies examined above, several concluding observations can be made:

1. These testimonies are true to life. They are corroborated by the credentials of authentic

personal experience and complex individual diversity. They make sense historically, and they emerge distinctly even from widely scattered primary sources within individual authors.

2. The testimonies become linguistically more definite as time progresses. Lehi at first spoke of Jesus being "*a* messiah," "*a* prophet," "*a* savior" (1 Nephi 10:4) or "*this* Redeemer" (1 Nephi 10:5), but this soon crystallized in Nephi's abridgment as "*the* Messiah" (1 Nephi 10:7, 9, 10).¹⁷ It is also evident that Lehi was not explicit at first about the meaning of the "redemption" of this Messiah. Was it to be a spiritual redemption in the next life, or a physical redemption of the land now or later? This question was raised at least twice by Laman and Lemuel (1 Nephi 15:31; 22:1), and finally answered by Nephi—it would be both (1 Nephi 22:3).

3. The record often indicates when and how important details about Christ were revealed. The name of "Christ," for example, was told to Jacob by an angel; and the name of "Jesus Christ" was revealed to Nephi; the extended name, "Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning," was first given to the people by king Benjamin to distinguish them above all people led out by the Lord. Nephite knowledge of Christ, like all other facets of revealed knowledge, grew "line upon line" (2 Nephi 28:30).

4. As times and conditions changed, some words used in describing Christ dropped out of the Nephite texts, while others became more frequent in usage. Words like "Messiah," "Lamb of God," and "Holy One of Israel" were used often by Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob, but rarely by later Book of Mormon writers. The earlier texts tend to connect the Lord more with Israel than do the later writers.

5. The earlier Book of Mormon writers use greater variety in their names for Christ than do the later writers. In the early texts, more forms of expression were used and greater variety exists in their formulations. Of the sixty-seven names researched in this study, Lehi used fifteen, Nephi used thirty-two, and Jacob, nineteen. Nephite religious speech was evidently more fluid in the

earlier generations when the revelations were new. As Nephite religious practices and culture became more established, standardized forms and conventions of discourse evidently prevailed.

6. Significantly different names for Christ are used by the various writers of the Book of Mormon. Of the sixty-seven names, thirty-seven are used only by one of the ten prophets under examination. This is further evidence of the multiple authorship of the ancient records underlying the Book of Mormon.

7. The names used for Christ in the Book of Mormon are important conveyors of meaning, content, and power. Names in antiquity typically conveyed meaning. They bespoke the character, individuality, and qualities of the person.¹⁸ Knowing and personally taking upon oneself the name of God was a sacred and vital function in ancient Israel and in the Book of Mormon: "And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them" (Numbers 6:27); "there is no other name given whereby salvation cometh" (Mosiah 5:8). From the profiles left in their written words, it is evident that these prophets bore the name of Christ personally upon their hearts and souls.

As Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon saw the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, they exclaimed, "And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!" (D&C 76:22). Well does their modern testimony mention the fact that *many* testimonies have been given of him.

ENDNOTES

1. The thesis of this article was first presented in my entry in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), entitled "Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon."
2. On "the angel of the Lord" as a manifestation of Jehovah himself, see Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:77-78.
3. See generally Robert J. Matthews, "What the Book of Mormon Tells Us About Jesus Christ," in P. Cheesman, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1988), 21-43; "The Atonement of Jesus Christ: 2 Nephi 9," in M. Nyman and C. Tate, eds., *Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1989), 177-99; Robert L. Millet, "Another Testament of Jesus Christ," in M. Nyman and C. Tate, eds., *First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1988), 161-75; see also Joseph Fielding McConkie, "The Testimony of Christ Through the Ages," in M. Nyman and C. Tate, eds., *Jacob Through Words of Mormon, To Learn with Joy* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1990), 157-73.
4. In analyzing these individual testimonies of Christ, I have tried to examine all the names and titles used by each prophet to refer to Christ, as well as the attributes and functions of Christ that they mention. For the names, see Table 1. The resulting profiles, of course, are not absolute; they only reflect the words that have survived in the Nephite record and are not necessarily indicative of all the words ever spoken. I have considered three factors to be especially significant in sketching these possible profiles: 1) unique phrases; 2) frequently repeated words or phrases; and 3) points that are given the greatest emphasis in the messages of each prophet. Each profile could easily be developed further.
5. On the "first-fruits" in Israelite sacrificial law, see, e.g., Exodus 13:1-13; Exodus 23:19; Leviticus 2:12, 14; 23:17, 20; Nehemiah 10:35.
6. Jacob's word *Christ* (the English translation being based on the Greek word *christos*, meaning "anointed") took an important step by focusing on the role of the Messiah as the holy, anointed one. Nephi's word *Jesus*, like the name *Joshua* (which derives from the Hebrew root *yashac*, meaning "to deliver, rescue, or save"), added emphasis to the Messiah's role as Savior, a *mosiah* (cf. Isaiah 49:26). See John Sawyer, "What Was a *mosiac*?" *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 475-86; F.A.R.M.S. Update, April 1989. I count 2 Nephi 10:3 as the first appearance of the word *Christ* in the Book of Mormon, since the name *Jesus Christ* that appears in the manuscripts and 1830 edition of 1 Nephi 12:18 was deleted by Joseph Smith in the 1837 edition.
7. This name implicitly assumes familiarity with such images as the dumb sheep before the slaughterer (Isaiah 53:7) or the substituted ram in the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22).
8. John M. Lundquist, "The Common Temple Ideology of the Ancient Near East," in T. Madsen, ed., *The Temple in Antiquity* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1984), 59-71; Stephen D. Ricks, "Liturgy and Cosmogony" (Provo, Utah: F.A.R.M.S., 1981).
9. He was indicted with the crimes of false prophecy, bearing false witness, blasphemy, and reviling or lying about the king.

10. God the Father is implicit in the passage "he shall grow up *before him* as a tender plant" (Mosiah 14:2), and explicit in his statement about Christ "having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father" (Mosiah 15:2, 5).

11. When the multitude fell down upon the ground, overcome in awe by the fear of the Lord, they repeated back to the king essentially the words of this name: "We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things" (Mosiah 4:2; cf. also 5:15). This name was uttered once again by Samuel the Lamanite. As he cursed the people of Zarahemla (the same city in which Benjamin had given this name more than a century earlier), Samuel told them "of the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning" (Helaman 14:12). One may suspect that Samuel invoked the wrath of the people in Zarahemla not only by prophesying their doom but also by openly reminding them of their neglect of this most sacred and holy name.

12. For evidence of this as an authentic part of the earliest Christian accounts of Jesus' passion, see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), 177.

13. TB, Yoma 187. The number ten is a symbolic number, representing completeness and perfection.

14. The believing men were driven out, not killed (Alma 14:7; 15:1); all their property was undoubtedly lost, confiscated or forsaken (Alma 15:16). The idea that Amulek's women and children were believers seems likely, since he mentions having women, children, father, kinsfolk, and friends in Alma 10:4, 11, but Alma 15:16 only says that he was rejected by his friends, father and kindred. I assume that the word "kindred" in Alma 15:16 does not encompass the women and children, although the phrase "all my kindred" in Alma 10:11 may.

15. R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 750-51.

16. It appears only one other time, in 2 Nephi 22:2, a passage quoted from Isaiah.

17. Compare also the early christological words (quoted from Zenos) that speak only of "*thy* Son" (Alma 33:11, 13, 16), with Alma's subsequent understanding of these words to mean "*the* Son" (Alma 33:14, 17).

18. See Truman G. Madsen, "'Putting on the Names': A Jewish-Christian Legacy," and Bruce H. Porter and Stephen D. Ricks, "Names in Antiquity: Old, New, and Hidden," in S. Ricks and J. Lundquist, eds., *By Study and Also By Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1990), 1:461, 474, 502.

Table 1[illegible]

	Lehi	I	Nephi	Jacob	Abinadi	Benjamin	Alma	Amulek	Samuel	Mormon	Moroni
			II								
			III								
God of Abr, Is & Jac	1	1					2				1
Mighty One of Israel		1									
Mighty One of Jacob			1								
Holy One of Israel	2	6	6	17							1
Holy One	1			1							1
Holy Being											1
Very God of Israel			1								
Lord	2	24	90	24	18	17	35	3	27	8	3
Lord of Hosts			7		6				3		
Lord God		4	3	32	9	5	9	1		1	
Lord God of Hosts			2								
Lord God Almighty	1					1					
Lord God Omnipotent											
Lord Omnipotent						4					
Christ											
Jesus Christ			45	20	7	8	10	8	2	33	36
Jesus is the Christ			4			2	2		1		16
The very Christ			1								
Lord Jesus Christ			1			1	3		1	1	2
Christ the Lord					1	1			1	3	
Christ Jesus							1				
Christ the Son								1			
Jesus			3	1							8
Lord Jesus											1
God	1	1	2	7	7	40	5			1	
The Very God										1	
Mighty God				1							
Eternal God		1	1	1							1
Eternal Father					2			1			
Father					6						
Father and Son											1
Father of Heaven and Earth			1			1		1	1		1

	Lehi	I	Nephi	Jacob	Abinadi	Benjamin	Alma	Amulek	Samuel	Mormon	Moroni
			I								
			II								
			III								
King of Heaven				1			1				
Heavenly King					1						
Maker				2							
Great Creator				3							
All-powerful Creator				1							
Creator					1		1		1		
Shepherd										1	
Good Shepherd							8				
Great and True Shepherd									1		
Great Eternal Head									1		
Jehovah											1

Totals:

Total names: = 67

A. Number of unique names used = 37	6	3	2	5	5	1	3	2	1	2	3	4
		(*Nephi total 10)										
B. Number of names used:	15	14	10	22	19	8	14	19	8	11	13	15
		(*Nephi total 32)										
Approximate individual uniqueness ratio (A/B):												
(does not reflect different sample sizes)	.40	.22	.20	.21	.26	.17	.21	.10	.13	.18	.23	.27
		(*Nephi total .32)										

*Nephi's texts were examined in three blocks, since 1 Nephi 11-14 is primarily the words of the angel, 1 Nephi 15-22 is mainly a narrative text, and 2 Nephi 25-33 is prophetic explication and exhortation.