



Moses' prophecy binds all the holy prophets and scriptural records—those of the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants—together as one.

# “A Prophet . . . Like unto Thee”

ROSEANN BENSON AND JOSEPH FIELDING MCCONKIE

RoseAnn Benson (*roseannbenison@gmail.com*) is an adjunct professor in ancient scripture and Church history and doctrine at BYU.

Joseph Fielding McConkie (*joseph.mcconkie@gmail.com*) is a professor emeritus of ancient scripture, BYU.

While leading the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses uttered what would become one of the most oft-quoted of all the messianic prophecies—a prophecy which in turn would spark the spirit of prophecy anew in his fellow prophets in succeeding dispensations. The Messiah, he declared, would be a great prophet like unto himself. The Messiah would be the covenant spokesman, uttering the words of his Father. All would be accountable for their obedience or disobedience to the words which he would speak. Many subsequent prophets who repeated this prophecy offered additional insight into, clarification about, and identification of the forthcoming Messiah, illustrating the fact that pondering on existing revelation begets further revelation.

The title of this paper comes from this messianic prophecy and begins with the words spoken to Moses by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is a prophecy that has a dual fulfillment; it embraces both Christ’s first and second comings. It binds together the testimony of all the ancient holy prophets from Moses, who first gathered Israel to the covenant of salvation, to the latter-day prophet Joseph Smith, who was destined to stand at the head of the final great gathering to Christ. It seals the Old Testament to the New

Testament and the testimony of the Old World to that of the New World. It shows that, where there is true testimony of Christ, the spirit of revelation will also be found. Through these many prophecies, we see the power of that Spirit as it rests upon each of the prophets in turn, inspiring them not only to embrace what those before had known but also to add revelations of their own. It dramatizes the necessity of obedience to the words of Christ as they were given to those of the past and also as they are spoken by modern prophets in our own day and time. It is the story of a true and living Church and the ordinances of salvation that can only be found in it.

Key terms such as “raise up,” “prophet,” and “like unto thee,” stipulations that the Messiah would be born into the house of Israel, and reminders that the people would be required to obey his commands are frequently repeated themes in the scriptures. We will examine the frequent repetition and implications of these phrases and also references to Moses’ brass serpent in the Book of Mormon, New Testament, Joseph Smith—History, and Doctrine and Covenants.

### Moses’ Prophecy

In defining how the Levites’ inheritance was different from the rest of the other tribes of Israel, explaining how their sacrifices were to be distinguished from those of other nations and clarifying the role of true prophets, Moses made this majestic prophecy: “The Lord thy God will *raise up* unto thee *a Prophet* from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, *like unto me*; unto him ye shall hearken. . . . I [God] will *raise them up a Prophet* from among their brethren, *like unto thee*, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, *I will require it of him*” (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18–19; emphasis added).

Appropriately, the context of this prophecy is a message to the tribe of Levi, which symbolized the Messiah as the sacrificial offering of the house of Israel to God. (This is the tribe God designated to hold the lesser priesthood and charged with the authority to minister and keep pure the sacrifices in the temple; their primary role was to prepare the way for the Israelites to accept Christ.) After explaining that the Levites are to be “perfect with the Lord,” Moses identified how the people are to recognize this particular prophet. He declared that a prophet would be raised up by God, born in the house of Israel, and like unto Moses (a man foreordained by God). He would also be

a giver of God’s law, as Moses had been on Mount Sinai. Just as the Mosaic law required obedience, so would obedience be required of the laws that this future prophet would declare. The house of Israel would in part be able to recognize the true Prophet because he would command obedience to his word.

Moses used a physical symbol as a powerful reminder of this prophecy when he raised up the brass serpent to offer Christ’s healing power to those who had been bitten by the flying fiery serpents (see Numbers 21:6–9). Direct references to this event, as well as allusions to it, are found throughout the Book of Mormon and the Gospel of John.

### **Book of Mormon Witnesses**

Among the numerous Book of Mormon prophets who testified of Christ were Lehi, Nephi, Abinadi, Alma the Younger, and Nephi (son of Helaman), who significantly added to our understanding of Moses’ prophecy. It is noteworthy that Lehi quoted from Joseph of Egypt, Nephi quoted from Zenos, Zenock, and Neum, and Alma quoted from Zenos and Zenock to add further light and revelation to Moses’ prophecy.

*Lehi.* Lehi briefly alluded to Moses’ prophecy, apparently because the Nephites were familiar enough with the prophecy to recognize even a brief phrase such as “a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews.” He linked Moses’ prophecy about the prophet-Messiah who is “like unto thee” (Moses) to a prophecy made by Joseph of Egypt that utilized similar phraseology. This prophecy mentions that a “choice seer” would be raised up in the latter days who also would be “great like Moses” and “like unto me” (Joseph of Egypt).

Lehi’s vision of the Jews referred to and supplemented Moses’ prophecy:

[Lehi] spake unto them concerning the Jews. . . .

*A prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or, in other words, a Savior of the world.*

And he also spake concerning the prophets, how great a number had testified of these things, concerning this Messiah, of whom he had spoken, or this Redeemer of the world.

Wherefore, all mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state, and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer.

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

*Yea, even he should go forth and cry in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight. . . .*

And after he had baptized the Messiah with water, he should behold and bear record that he had baptized the Lamb of God, who should take away the sins of the world. . . .

And after they had slain the Messiah, who should come, and after he had been slain he should *rise* from the dead, and should make himself manifest, by the Holy Ghost, unto the Gentiles. (1 Nephi 10:2–11; emphasis added)

In this prophecy, Lehi repeated Moses' pronouncements that the prophet would be (1) "raised up" (that is, be established), and (2) from "among the Jews." But Lehi's prophecy gave four additional pieces of information. First, Lehi testified that this great prophet would be the Messiah, anointed to be Savior and Redeemer, who would make recompense for the sins of the world.<sup>1</sup> Second, instead of repeating Moses' words that heeding this prophet was "required," Lehi explained why obedience is necessary: the chosen one is a Savior and Redeemer who will deliver mankind from their lost and fallen state. Third, he linked this prophet to Isaiah's prophecy of a forerunner who will baptize and testify of the Messiah: "the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." (Isaiah 40:3). Fourth, Lehi taught that the Messiah would be slain by the Jews, and be resurrected from the dead and that his words would be given to the Gentiles (or the nations) through the Holy Ghost.

Significantly, Lehi also quoted Joseph of Egypt, who just before his death prophesied of two choice seers whom the Lord would raise up. Neither of these would be the Savior and Redeemer; however, the "raising up" and "like unto you" themes common to that earlier prophecy are repeated in this prophecy, pointing to the connection between the three prophet-seers. One of these choice seers would deliver his people out of Egyptian bondage, and the other would restore knowledge of the covenants of salvation made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:

A seer shall the Lord my God *raise up*, who shall be a choice seer unto the fruit of my loins. . . . A choice seer will I *raise up* out of the fruit of thy loins. . . .

And he shall bring them to the knowledge of the covenants which I have made with thy fathers; and he shall do whatsoever work I shall command him.

And I will make him great in mine eyes, for he shall do my work; and he shall be great like unto him who I have said I would *raise up* unto you, to deliver my people, O house of Israel, out of the land of Egypt. . . . ;

And again, a seer will I *raise up* out of the fruit of thy loins, and unto him will I give power to bring forth my word unto the seed of thy loins; and not to the bringing forth of my word only, saith the Lord, but to the convincing them of my word, which shall have already gone forth among them in the last days. . . .

And that seer will I bless, and they that seek to destroy him shall be confounded; for this promise I give unto you; for I will remember you from generation to generation; and his name shall be called Joseph, and it shall be after the name of his father; and he shall be *like unto you*; for the thing which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand shall bring my people unto salvation. (Joseph Smith Translation [JST], Genesis 50:24–33; emphasis added)

Lehi obtained these “great prophecies” made by Joseph of Egypt concerning the latter-day seer from the brass plates (see 2 Nephi 3:4–21), and he quoted them in teaching his son, Joseph.<sup>2</sup> The Lord promised Joseph of Egypt that in the latter days this branch would learn of covenants with God by a choice seer whom the Lord would “raise up” from Joseph’s posterity, and who would be great “like unto Moses” (2 Nephi 3:5–7). Joseph of Egypt knew that this latter-day seer and the seer’s father would have the same name, “Joseph” (2 Nephi 3:15).<sup>3</sup>

Joseph Smith’s patriarchal blessing, given to him by his father, Joseph Smith Sr., proclaimed the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joseph of Egypt and announced that Joseph Smith Jr. was the one who would restore covenants and lead the gathering of Israel in the last days.<sup>4</sup> This blessing reaffirmed Joseph of Egypt’s knowledge of Joseph Smith and identified Joseph Smith as the choice seer, who would bless Joseph of Egypt’s posterity, as well as begin the restoration of the house of Israel.<sup>5</sup>

*Nephi.* In his first book, Nephi, while preparing a separate set of records called the small plates of Nephi, alluded to the teachings of his father regarding Moses’ prophecy. On those plates, he quoted Zenos, Zenock, and Neum from the brass plates, adding their prophecies to the accumulating knowledge about the forthcoming Messiah. This triad of prophets, by centering on the visitation of the Lord God to all the house of Israel after his resurrection (see 1 Nephi 19:10–11), amplified the words spoken by Moses. Nephi also noted the time line for the fulfillment of their prophecy: “He cometh . . . in six hundred years from the time my father left Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 19:8). Nephi added to his father’s words by focusing solely on the atoning sacrifice and quoting more precise language to express what would take place. Nephi declared that the “very God of Israel” would, in the words of Zenock, be lifted up, and, in Neum’s more definitive account of his death, would be crucified, and in Zenos’s description, “buried in a sepulchre” (1 Nephi 19:7, 10). Nephi emphasized these multiple sources by summarizing their words and then adding and explaining two prophecies from Isaiah regarding the love of the “Lord their Redeemer” for all the house of Israel. He recounted these prophecies so

that his people, “a remnant of the house of Israel,” could have hope for their own redemption (1 Nephi 19:24).

Nephi concluded his first book by quoting, explaining, and identifying the Messiah in Moses’ prophecy, by focusing this time on his Second Coming:

Wherefore, the *righteous need not fear* . . . if it so be that they [the wicked] will harden their hearts against the Holy One of Israel.

For behold, the *righteous shall not perish*; for the time surely must come that all they who fight against Zion shall be *cut off*.

And the Lord will surely prepare a way for his people, unto the fulfilling of the words of Moses, which he spake, saying: *A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that all those who will not hear that prophet shall be cut off from among the people.*

And now I, Nephi, declare unto you, that *this prophet of whom Moses spake was the Holy One of Israel; wherefore, he shall execute judgment in righteousness.* (1 Nephi 22:17–21; emphasis added)

Nephi’s recitation of Moses’ prophecy included this additional valuable information: first, a promise of protection to the righteous (defined as all those who are obedient to the Holy One of Israel); second, a warning that failure to heed the “requirement” would bring forth the pronouncement of a curse, “cut[ting] off” all who were disobedient to the words of this prophet; and third, an identification of the spokesman as not just a prophet, but as the Holy One of Israel. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland declares that this passage of Nephi echoes and clarifies Moses’ prophecy and presages messianic writings of Malachi and John the Beloved, “underscoring the fact that common gospel themes have been taught by all the prophets in all ages, even to the point of commonly revealed language and imagery in some of their messianic teachings.”<sup>6</sup>

Nephi also mentioned the story of fiery flying serpents as he told how Moses led the house of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Initially, Nephi used the visual illustration of Moses’ brass serpent as a tool to teach about the “simplicity of the way” and the “easiness” of looking to the Lord for healing (1 Nephi 17:41). In his second book, Nephi again referred to the brass serpent placed on the rod and noted that this serpent was a powerful representation of Christ. He began and ended his testimony with a sacred Semitic oath: “And as the Lord God liveth that brought Israel up out of the land of Egypt, and gave unto Moses power that he should heal the nations after they had been bitten by the poisonous serpents, if they would cast their eyes unto the serpent which he did *raise up* before them. . . . Yea, behold I say unto you, that as these things are true, and as the Lord God liveth, there is none other

name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ, of which I have spoken, whereby man can be saved” (2 Nephi 25:20; emphasis added).

*Abinadi.* Centuries later, while teaching the wicked priests of King Noah, Abinadi used Moses’ prophecy to compare the preparatory law given through Moses to the new law that would come from God, explaining that salvation could not come through the law of Moses alone: “For behold, did not Moses prophesy unto them concerning the coming of the Messiah, and that God should redeem his people? Yea, and even all the prophets who have prophesied ever since the world began—have they not spoken more or less concerning these things? Have they not said that God himself should come down among the children of men, and take upon him the form of man, and go forth in mighty power upon the face of the earth? Yea, and have they not said also that he should bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, and that he, himself, should be oppressed and afflicted?” (Mosiah 13:33–35).

First, Abinadi focused on the difference in the power of the sacrifices that were part of the law of Moses and “the atonement, which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people” (Mosiah 13:28). He taught that God would become mortal in order to bless the dead with resurrection. He then quoted what is often called the “Song of the Suffering Servant,” Isaiah’s magnificent prophecy of Jesus Christ (see Isaiah 53). Abinadi both introduced and concluded his quotation of Isaiah with his testimony “that God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people” (Mosiah 13:34; 15:1).

*Alma the Younger.* Alma, in teaching the Zoramites, referred to the messianic teachings of Zenos, Zenock, and Moses. Alma emphasized the mercy of Jesus Christ by alluding to the brass serpent with these words: “Behold a type was *raised up* in the wilderness, that whosoever would look upon it might live. And many did look and live” (Alma 33:19; emphasis added). Alma then connected his previous teachings on humble faith in Jesus Christ as key to receiving mercy: “But few understood the meaning of those things, and this because of the hardness of their hearts. But there were many who were so hardened that they would not look, therefore they perished. Now the reason they would not look is because they did not believe that it would heal them. O my brethren, if ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes that ye might be healed, would ye not behold quickly, or would ye rather harden your hearts in unbelief. . . . If so, wo shall come upon you; but if not so, then cast about your eyes and begin to believe in the Son of God” (Alma 33:19–20).

Alma, just prior to his being translated, again alluded to the “look and live” message of the brass serpent when he passed along sacred relics—the records, interpreters, and Liahona—and gave instructions to his son Helaman. He declared that “it is as easy [in his day] to give heed to the word of Christ” as it was in the days of Lehi to give heed to the Liahona (Alma 37:44). Alma identified the director as a type given by God to lead Lehi’s family safely to the promised land “that if they would look they might live” (Alma 37:45–46). He concluded with the admonition “See that ye look to God and live” (Alma 37:47).

*Nephi, son of Helaman.* In an effort to prove to the unbelieving Nephites that he was a prophet and his words were equivalent to those of the ancient prophets, Nephi referred to Moses’ prophecy and cited the example of lifting up the brass serpent. “Yea, did he [Moses] not bear record that the Son of God should come? And as he *lifted up* the brazen serpent in the wilderness, even so shall he be *lifted up* who should come. And as many as should look upon that serpent should live, even so as many as should look upon the Son of God with faith, having a contrite spirit, might live, even unto that life which is eternal” (Helaman 8:14–15; emphasis added). By denying Nephi’s prophecies, the Nephites were denying not only him but all the preceding prophets, Abraham, Zenos, Zenock, Ezias, Isaiah, Jeremiah, as well as Lehi and Nephi, who had also testified of the Messiah.

### **New Testament Witnesses**

Matthew, Luke, and John each took different approaches in demonstrating that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy. Matthew expended considerable effort linking Moses and Jesus through their shared experiences: membership in the house of Israel, sojourn in Egypt, baptism, theophany, temptations from Satan, and law-giving roles. Luke linked Jesus to John the Baptist, who was to prepare the way for Jesus’ earthly advent. John the Apostle quoted from John the Baptist clarifying his role as a preparer of the way. He quoted from Jesus’ exchange with Nicodemus regarding the brazen serpent; he also used various “I am” and “raising up” or “lifting up” passages to show that Jesus is the promised messianic prophet. In the book of Acts, Peter and Stephen also testified that Jesus fulfilled Moses’ prophecy.

*Matthew.* One of the primary focuses of Matthew’s testimony was proving to the Jews that Jesus was a prophet like Moses. For example, Matthew 1 cites the genealogy of Jesus Christ, linking him to the house of Israel through

the lineage of David. Matthew 2 records that both Moses and Jesus came out of Egypt. Matthew 3 proclaims the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan at Bethabara by John the Baptist, analogous to the symbolic baptism of the house of Israel as Moses led them out of Egypt through the Red Sea. Matthew 4 begins by detailing Jesus’ forty-day communion in the wilderness with his Father, culminating with the temptations by Satan, similar to Moses’ temptation by Satan (Moses 1), and forty days on Mount Sinai. Matthew 5 follows with the giving of the new law, the Sermon on the Mount, which shows that Jesus is a lawgiver like Moses.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, Matthew quoted Isaiah, calling Jesus “Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matthew 1:23). This points to Nephi’s and Abinadi’s fuller expositions of Moses’ prophecy that this prophet is the “Holy One of Israel” (1 Nephi 22:21), or “God himself [who] shall come down among the children of men” (Mosiah 13:34; 15:1).

Toward the end of his record, Matthew again connected Jesus to Moses by alluding to Moses’ ancient messianic prophecy. Joseph Smith, as part of his inspired translation (Joseph Smith—Matthew), reordered the verses of Matthew 24, clarifying which parts of the prophecy refer to the immediate future of Jerusalem and which ones refer to latter-day signs of the Second Coming and the destruction of the wicked. At the conclusion of the latter-day signs, the Prophet Joseph added a passage to Matthew’s parable of the wise and evil servants. The wise man is watching and working as he awaits the return of his Lord, while the evil man is neither watching nor working. The distinguishing characteristic of the evil man is hypocrisy—he is one who knows about Jesus Christ but chooses apostasy and disobedience to the commandments. Accordingly, he is judged by his actions: “And thus cometh the end of the wicked, according to the prophecy of Moses, saying: They shall be cut off from among the people; but the end of the earth is not yet, but by and by” (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:55).

*Luke.* This Gospel account used parallel birth stories to link John the Baptist and Jesus Christ; this refers both to the connection mentioned by Gabriel<sup>8</sup> (“He [John the Baptist] shall go before him [Jesus Christ] in the spirit and power of Elias . . . to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” [Luke 1:17]) and to Isaiah’s prophecy about Jesus Christ’s forerunner. When Zacharias named and blessed his son, an occasion known as the *Benedictus*,<sup>9</sup> he announced the coming of the Redeemer, the one prophesied by all the prophets, and declared that John’s mission is to “go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways” (Luke 1:76).

*John.* Evidently, John the Beloved borrowed from an earlier record by John the Baptist to tell the following unique incident, which clarifies John the Baptist's mission:<sup>10</sup>

And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem, to ask him; Who art thou?

And he confessed, and denied not *that he was Elias*; but confessed, *saying*; I am not the Christ.

And they asked him, *saying*; *How then art thou Elias?* And he said, *I am not that Elias who was to restore all things.* And they asked him, *saying*, Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.

Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?

He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as saith the prophet Esaias.

And they who were sent were of the Pharisees.

And they asked him, and said unto him; Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not the Christ, nor Elias *who was to restore all things*, neither that prophet?

John answered them, *saying*; I baptize with water, but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not;

*He it is of whom I bear record. He is that prophet, even Elias*, who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose, *or whose place I am not able to fill; for he shall baptize, not only with water, but with fire, and with the Holy Ghost.* (JST, John 1:20–28; italics show JST additions and clarifications)

The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to the Jordan River to ask John the Baptist a series of questions. The priesthood from the temple was obviously threatened by his appearance (see 1 Maccabees 4:42; 14:41), and they decided to ask him who he thought he was. They feared that he was a prophet and that his coming would put an end to their power, wealth, and authority.<sup>11</sup> Hence the question, “Who art thou?” (John 1:19). This was not an inquiry about his name, but rather about his status and claim to authority among the Jews.<sup>12</sup> John answered that he was not the Messiah spoken of by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15–19.

In his interchange with the Jerusalem questioners,<sup>13</sup> John the Baptist emphatically rebutted “any of the traditional eschatological roles for himself.”<sup>14</sup> He denied being the Messiah, the Elias who was to restore all things, and the latter-day prophet (see JST, John 1:21–22). Having exhausted the known possibilities, the questioners asked again: “Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?” (JST, John 1:23). In his answer to this question, John identified himself as the fulfillment

of Isaiah’s prophecy about a man who would prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ; he also explained his limited role to baptize with water (but not with the fire of the Holy Ghost) and to bear witness of the greatest prophet (see JST, John 1:24, 28). John’s answers teach who he is not, as well as who he is.

John the Beloved’s Gospel also records what some believe is a direct quotation of Jesus’s teaching to a Pharisee about being born again. In this instance, Jesus explained that the brazen serpent was a representation of himself and that his being raised up on the cross was similar to how Nicodemus could be raised up: “And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses *lifted up* the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be *lifted up*: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:13–15; emphasis added).<sup>15</sup>

*Peter’s testimony.* Subsequent to Jesus’s crucifixion, resurrection, forty-day ministry, and ascension into heaven and the day of Pentecost, Peter became a renewed and more committed disciple. Following the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, he testified that “Jesus of Nazareth, a man *approved of God*, . . . ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath *raised up*” (Acts 2:22–24; emphasis added), alluding to Moses’ prophecy that this is the foreordained prophet that God resurrected. This brief testimony was followed by a second testimony in which he closely paraphrased Moses’ prophecy and added the phrases “times of refreshing” and “restitution of all things.” With these phrases, he referred to the last dispensation and Second Coming of Jesus Christ and clarified the dual fulfillment of the prophecy. Instead of using Moses’ phrase regarding obedience (“God will require it of him”), Peter stated that those who will not hear the words of Jesus Christ will be destroyed at his Second Coming:

Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? . . .

Those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the *times of refreshing* shall come from the presence of the Lord;

And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:

Whom the heaven must receive until the *times of restitution* of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.

*And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.* (Acts 3:12, 18–23; emphasis added)

*Stephen's testimony.* Just before his martyrdom, Stephen defended himself by recounting key names in the lineage of the house of Israel, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph of Egypt, and Moses (see Acts 7:8–9, 20). Stephen particularly emphasized the Lord's hand in preparing Moses, and he concluded his testimony by linking Moses' prophecy to Jesus Christ: "This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, *A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear*" (Acts 7:37; emphasis added). By concluding his testimony this way, he accused them of persecuting and slaying the prophets who testified of the "Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:52).

### **Jesus Christ's Declarations in the Book of Mormon**

Following his resurrection, Jesus appeared to the righteous remnant of the Nephites, showed the tokens of his sacrifice, gave the new law, and introduced the sacrament. He then made certain they recognized that he was the fulfillment of Moses' prophecy: "Behold, I am he of whom Moses spake, saying: *A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul who will not hear that prophet shall be cut off from among the people*" (3 Nephi 20:23; emphasis added).

Next, Jesus identified the sign that will indicate when the promised covenant of future gathering and restoration will begin to be fulfilled. He linked this sign to his servant, explaining that the coming forth of the Nephite record from the Gentiles to the latter-day Lamanites will signal that the gathering has begun (see 3 Nephi 21:1–7). The restoration or "great and marvelous work" is linked to "a man [who] shall declare it unto them" and "my servant . . . [who] shall be marred" (3 Nephi 21:9–10).<sup>16</sup> This, then, is the latter-day servant who will bring forth the Nephite record and restore many other great and marvelous things, preparing the way for the Second Coming. Jesus warned that "whosoever will not believe in my words, who am Jesus Christ, which the Father shall cause him [the latter-day servant] to bring forth unto the Gentiles, and shall give unto him [the latter-day servant] power that he shall bring them forth unto the Gentiles, (it shall be done even as Moses said) they shall be cut off from among my people who are of the covenant" (3 Nephi 21:11). Although he did not name him in this instance,

the Lord was prophesying of Joseph Smith, who would bring forth the testimony of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Book of Mormon, that all must obey or be cut off. Jesus promised that the servant—although marred—would be healed, perhaps symbolizing that although Joseph Smith would be slain as if he were a false or fallen prophet, his reputation as a true prophet would eventually increase as truth began to fill the earth (see 3 Nephi 21:10).<sup>17</sup> Moroni alluded to this point when he told Joseph that his name “should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people” (Joseph Smith—History 1:33). Joseph Smith called it the “deep water . . . I am wont to swim in” (D&C 127:2). Regardless of his marring, “the work which he would set in motion, the marvelous work and a wonder—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—would roll forward to eventually fill the whole earth.”<sup>18</sup> Just as Joseph of Egypt prophesied, the “choice seer” of the latter days “shall be great like unto Moses” (2 Nephi 3:6, 9).

This message—that if you do not accept the testimony of Jesus Christ as it comes through Joseph Smith you will be “cut off” from the blessings promised to the covenant family—is the most important warning found in the Book of Mormon. Elder Bruce R. McConkie declared, “Those who will not hear the voice of the Lord, as proclaimed by his servants the prophets, shall be cut off from among the people when he comes again. . . . There ought not [to] be any confusion or misunderstanding on these points.”<sup>19</sup> This is the promise to the faithful house of Israel that all enemies will be destroyed at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (see 3 Nephi 21:11–21; Isaiah 34). As the book *Valiant in the Testimony of Christ* expressed it, “Joseph Smith is the great revelator of Christ for this dispensation. To reject his testimony, his authority, and the doctrine that comes through him, is to reject the living Christ.”<sup>20</sup>

Jesus followed up his teachings by quoting from Isaiah about the vast numbers of people who will be gathered into the house of Israel in the latter days (see 3 Nephi 22) and from Malachi the promise of servants who will prepare for his Second Coming: (1) “Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant” (3 Nephi 24:1; Malachi 3:1); and (2) Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord . . . lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (3 Nephi 25:5–6; Malachi 4:5–6). The prophecies in Malachi refer to several messengers who prepare the way and also to the

messenger of the covenant. By quoting these passages right after he had spoken about his marred servant, Jesus again identified one who prepares the way for his millennial coming as the servant spoken of in 3 Nephi 21:11 and the prophet Elijah as the servant mentioned in 3 Nephi 25:5. Thus the “marred servant” is the “choice seer” prophesied of by Joseph of Egypt, namely Joseph Smith. He, John the Baptist, and the prophet Elijah make the way straight by revealing lost doctrines and ordinances before the Second Coming of the covenant giver, Jesus Christ.

Jesus concluded his testimony to the Nephites by again bearing testimony that he is the fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy. Rather than using Moses’ phrase “raised up,” he identified himself as the one who was “lifted up.” He repeated this phrase five times for emphasis:

Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me.

And my Father sent me that I might be *lifted up* upon the cross; and after that I had been *lifted up* upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been *lifted up* by men even so should men be *lifted up* by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—

And for this cause have I been *lifted up*; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works. (3 Nephi 27:13–15; emphasis added)

## The Latter Days

In this dispensation, Moroni appeared to seventeen-year-old Joseph Smith and quoted Old Testament prophecies—notably, prophecies by Moses, Isaiah, and Malachi. The story of Christ is woven perfectly through this first angelic ministration, the translation of the Book of Mormon, the translation of the Bible, and the receipt of the Doctrine and Covenants revelations. In his first visit to Joseph Smith, Moroni quoted from the same chapters of Malachi that Christ had given the Nephites and then recited from Isaiah 11, which identifies Jesus Christ to a latter-day ensign who will gather the Gentiles and the house of Israel.<sup>21</sup> Moroni culminated his testimony with Moses’ prophecy of Christ as quoted by Peter and recited it precisely as it is found in Acts 3 (Joseph Smith—History 1:36–40). As Moroni explained to Joseph Smith, “That prophet was Christ; but the day had not yet come when ‘they who would not hear his voice should be *cut off* from among the people,’ but soon would come” (Joseph Smith—History 1:40). His decision to quote these

particular scriptures implied that he was showing Joseph Smith his role as one of the messengers to prepare the way. Moroni suggested Joseph would do this by raising the standard (or ensign) to gather all to Christ before the great and dreadful day of his Second Coming.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord’s preface (section 1) and appendix (section 133) pick up the theme of “cutting off.” The prophecy of Moses acts as bookends in the Doctrine and Covenants, holding the entire story of the restoration of the gospel together. In the preface, the Lord warns all the inhabitants of the earth: “Prepare ye, prepare ye for that which is to come, for the Lord is nigh. . . . And the arm of the Lord shall be revealed; and the day cometh that they who will not hear the voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants, neither give heed to the words of the prophets and apostles, *shall be cut off* from among the people; for they have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant” (D&C 1:12–15; emphasis added).

In addition to warning of the curse, the Lord explained the need for the Restoration through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Because of apostasy, ordinances have been changed and the everlasting gospel covenant has been broken. The result has been the temporary triumph of selfishness, pride, and worldliness—Babylon (see D&C 1:16). Moroni told Joseph Smith that the time for the curse “soon would come” (Joseph Smith—History 1:40) and the Lord himself warned that the day is “nigh at hand” (D&C 1:35). Joseph Smith was the prophesied servant who would come before the Second Coming to declare God’s commandments and to reestablish God’s everlasting covenants that all might have the opportunity to be partakers of glory (see D&C 1:17, 22; 133:57, 60).

The appendix to the Doctrine and Covenants (the great revelation in section 133 about the last days) draws together the prophecies of Moses and Malachi and warns of the need to heed the commandments of the Lord: “And upon them that hearken not to the voice of the Lord shall be fulfilled that which was written by the prophet Moses, that they should be *cut off* from among the people. And also that which was written by the prophet Malachi: for, behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch” (D&C 133:63–64; emphasis added).

These passages reiterate the warning that those who do not accept the testimony of Christ as it comes through Joseph Smith will face spiritual and temporal destruction. Thus the immediate consequence of rebellion is loss of the Spirit, a kind of hell on earth, while the long-term consequence is being cut off from the family of Jesus Christ, having no binding ties to forebears or progeny.

## Conclusion

Moses' prophetic testimony about Jesus Christ was spoken to the tribe of Levi during the initial gathering of the house of Israel. All the rituals and ordinances the Levites performed were to prepare the house of Israel to accept the Lamb of God, make them ritually clean and prepare them to stand in his presence. This makes it profoundly important that John the Baptist be born into this tribe, that he be the rightful heir to the responsibilities of Aaron, and that he and his priesthood prepare the way for Christ not just once, but twice in restoring the keys of the ministering of angels and the gospel of repentance and baptism for the remission of sins (see D&C 84:26–27).

In the wilderness, Moses raised up the brass serpent, a symbolic archetype that could heal those with the faith to look at it, foreshadowing the power of Christ's Atonement. Book of Mormon witnesses repeatedly reference this symbol in teaching lessons about obedience, faith in Jesus Christ, mercy, and the easiness of the path to return to God.

In the New Testament, Matthew, Luke, John, Peter, and Stephen bore powerful testimony that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah of whom Moses had prophesied. Book of Mormon witnesses offered additional insight, clarification, and identification as they quoted from the brass plates and the writings of other prophets and alluded to the messianic prophecy. Jesus Christ quoted the messianic prophecy given by Moses to identify himself to the Nephites. Christ clarified that even though they heard his words personally, their descendants (and the nations of the world) would hear them through his latter-day prophet, Joseph Smith; he clarified that the words of latter-day prophets have the same power as his words do—to save or condemn.

Our examination of Moses' messianic prophecy has encircled all the scriptures and they sustain it as the most important prophecy given. This oft-repeated prophecy binds all the holy prophets and scriptural records—those of the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price—together as one. In

this way, the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants become perfect companions to and provide commentary on the Old and New Testaments. The repetition of all or part of Moses’ messianic revelation throughout the scriptures illustrates the nature of prophets of God—they all drink from the same fountain of pure water and tell the same story. They all teach the same doctrine about the coming of Christ from the same original prophecy, providing internal evidence that the Bible and Book of Mormon come from the same source, God, and teach the same doctrine. Their testimonies are the quintessential evidence that no scriptural text is to be seen as complete or final. The Holy Ghost is always willing to give further revelation to aid in the understanding of previous revelation.

When examined together, the prophecy, the symbolic archetype, and attendant additions and clarifications help us better understand the roles of Jesus Christ and those who herald his coming. We also see the importance of obedience to prophetic words. For example, Moses told us that the Lord requires our obedience, but only Lehi explained why; he said that “all mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state” and would remain in this state unless they turn to the Savior. Peter warned that those who are disobedient “shall be destroyed.” Christ, Moroni, and Joseph Smith echoed this warning but use a different phrase, “cut off.” Joseph Smith quoted Christ and added to the phrase when he said, “cut off . . . without branch or roots,” emphasizing the full magnitude of what spiritual destruction means. The “lifting up” of the brass serpent teaches that the only way to be healed from the effects of the Fall of Adam is to look to Christ. Unifying these scriptures clarifies the meaning of this prophecy and underscores the importance of obedience.

The perfection of this story reaches far beyond what Joseph Smith could have been expected to know. It demonstrates that his testimony is one with the ancient prophets—that he is like them. He restored and enlarged upon their testimonies. One cannot separate the messenger and the message from he who sent them; to accept Jesus Christ also means to accept the testimony of Joseph Smith, who was a “choice seer,” “raised up,” and “like unto Moses” (2 Nephi 3:6–7, 9). **RE**

---

## Notes

1. *Messiah* (Aramaic) and *Christ* (Greek) both mean “the anointed” and are used interchangeably. See Bible Dictionary, “Messiah,” 731.

2. Moses’ writings from Joseph Smith’s inspired translation of Genesis also refer to this prophecy. Speaking to Moses, Jehovah declared: “Thou shalt write the things which I shall

speak. And in a day when the children of men shall esteem my words as naught and take many of them from the book which thou shalt write, behold, I will *raise up another like unto thee*; and they shall be had again among the children of men—among as many as shall believe” (Moses 1:40–41, emphasis added).

3. Lehi added to Joseph of Egypt’s testimony by prophesying that the record kept by Lehi’s family would go to his posterity long after his death through this latter-day seer: “And I, behold, I will give unto him [Mormon] that he shall write the writing of the fruit of thy loins [the Nephites], unto the fruit of thy loins [the Lamanites]; and the spokesman of thy loins [Joseph Smith] shall declare it” (2 Nephi 3:18). The bracketed words are from Robert L. Millet, Joseph Fielding McConkie, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 1:211.

4. “*A marvelous work and a wonder*’ has the Lord wrought by thy hand, even that which shall prepare the way for the remnants of his people to come in among the Gentiles, with their fullness, as the tribes of Israel are restored. . . . *Behold, he [Joseph of Egypt] looked after his posterity in the last days, when they should be scattered and driven by the Gentiles, and wept before the Lord; he sought diligently to know from whence the Son should come who should bring forth the word of the Lord, by which they might be enlightened, and brought back to the true fold, and his eyes beheld thee, my son.* . . . He [Joseph of Egypt] said . . . my seed are to inherit the choice land whereon the Zion of God shall stand in the last days, *from among my seed, scattered with the Gentiles, shall a choice Seer arise.* “The Seed of Joseph,” *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, October 1932, 175; emphasis added.

5. According to Jewish legend, Joseph had additional dreams not recorded in Genesis 37 that he shared with his brothers. “Behold, you have gathered fruit, and so did I. Your fruit rotted, but mine remained sound. Your seed will set up dumb images of idols, but they will vanish at the appearance of my descendant, the Messiah of Joseph” Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967–69), 2:7.

6. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 45.

7. Interestingly, in our modern scriptures the chapter divisions match the first five chapters in Matthew to Moses’ five books of the Torah.

8. Joseph Smith identified Gabriel as Noah. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 3:386.

9. This is the canticle or song of Zacharias.

10. Doctrine and Covenants 93:18 reports that John the Baptist’s record will be restored to us.

11. Both higher and lower temple officials came to examine John. They had the responsibility to test the claims of prophets and were also experts in rituals of purification such as baptism. A. M. Hunter, “The Gospel According to John,” *Cambridge Bible Commentary* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 22; and Raymond E. Brown, “The Gospel According to John I–XII,” *Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 29:43. Jacob’s commentary regarding “priestcrafts and iniquities” (2 Nephi 10:5) among the powerful Jewish leadership in Jerusalem is telling.

12. George A. Buttrick, Walter R. Bowie, Paul Scherer, John Knox, Samuel Terrien, and Nolan B. Harmon, *Interpreter’s Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), 8:481.

13. His questioners were initially identified as priests and Levites—those from the temple. However, at this point in the account the questioners are identified as Pharisees, contradicting the previous statement. Perhaps two accounts have been merged, suggesting

that leaders from various groups were aware of the prophecies and were coming out to ask John questions.

14. Brown, “The Gospel According to John I–XII,” 29:46.

15. John has other passages in which he connected Jesus Christ to “that prophet” (see John 4:25–26; 6:14; 7:40) and identified him as “I am” [he], the great I AM, from Jehovah’s introduction to Moses in Exodus 3:14 (see John 6:20, 35, 41, 48, 51; 8:12, 18, 23–24, 28).

16. The original “marred” servant in Isaiah’s prophecies refers to Jesus Christ (see Isaiah 52:14). This passage was quoted by Jesus to the Nephites in promising the redemption of the Jews and the land of Jerusalem (see 3 Nephi 20:44).

17. Christ quoted Isaiah’s initial prophecy, “As many were astonished at thee—his visage was so marred” (Isaiah 52:14) as he fully identified himself to the Nephites (see 3 Nephi 20:44). He is the first fulfillment of this prophecy, and he linked himself to the latter-day servant who will also be marred.

18. McConkie, Millet, and Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4:149.

19. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 4:337.

20. Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Valiant in the Testimony of Christ* (Honeoye Falls, NY: Digital Legend, 2009), 259.

21. For more on this chapter of Isaiah, see RoseAnn Benson, “Joseph Smith and the Holy Messiah: Prophetically Linked by Joseph of Egypt and Isaiah,” *Religious Educator* 3, no. 3 (2002): 65–81.