



Elder Khumbulani D. Mdletshe

Diversity: The Strength of Book of Mormon Prophets

ELDER KHUMBULANI D. MDLETSHE

Elder Khumbulani D. Mdletshe is an Area Seventy and a Seminaries and Institutes regional coordinator at the Roodepoort Institute of Religion, South Africa.

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The apartheid government believed in “divide and rule.” Whites were divided according to which language they spoke: English or Afrikaans. Amongst the black Africans, tribal traditions and linguistic differences were emphasized, which caused the black Africans to be divided not only from the whites, but also from each other. For forty-six years, South Africans did not know each other. Eventually people got so tired of being divided according to race, culture, language, and other factors that they toppled the government and replaced it with a democratic one. Shortly after the removal of the apartheid system, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the former Church of England cleric and the anti-apartheid activist, coined the term “the Rainbow People” in appreciation of the diversity that existed in the country. He said, “Look at your hands—different colours representing different people. You are the rainbow people of God.”¹ Since 1994, South Africans of all races have been working together to build a new country that recognizes the strength of its diverse population.

I am privileged to teach institute classes that are made up of students from different backgrounds, including differences in race, gender, economic

status, level of education, and Church experiences. These differences enrich the discussion in the classroom. For example, a newly baptized student will ask a question that seems so simple to a lifelong member of the Church, but an answer to a simple question enriches everyone in the classroom as each student responds based on his or her unique background. As a teacher, I have learned to let the students ask whatever is in their minds and then leave it to students to respond. I would come in only when the students were finished responding to assist them in making sure that whatever had been said in the classroom would build their testimonies.

In my study of the Book of Mormon and in my classroom experiences, I have observed diversity in the background of prophets, which extends to their teachings. I have also noticed that their environment shapes their character, which in turn influences what and how they teach. An analysis of the teachings of Lehi, Jacob, King Benjamin, and Alma the Younger proves fruitful in showcasing this variety of background of the Book of Mormon prophets and to what extent it contributes to the richness of the book.

After examining the unique circumstances that shape each prophet's message, this paper will investigate five subtopics: Zenos and his teachings, Jesus Christ, resurrection, baptism, and the law of chastity. In discussing these topics, we will look for both consistency and variety across the four authors identified. It would be expected that they would teach a particular topic differently than one another. Their variety of teaching styles was informed by their own personal settings and experiences. Despite this diversity, they share a common purpose: "the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD."²

Settings for the Four Prophets

The four teachers selected make a significant contribution to the Book of Mormon. Indeed, their combined contribution is 14 percent of the entire book.³ Their teaching covers the time between 600 BC and 53 BC, over a five-hundred-year span. Of the four, only Lehi and Jacob have a close relationship. Benjamin and Alma are historically far removed from the founding fathers of the Book of Mormon and are fairly removed from each other.

John S. Tanner reminds us that "we tend to forget how our favorite verses relate to a particular speaker in a specific historical and rhetorical situation."⁴ The different audiences and settings contribute equally to what is taught and how it is taught. With such varied settings and audiences, the teachings

match the needs that existed at a particular time. For example, Lehi is the only one who teaches his small family about obeying God, even if it means leaving the comfort of his home (see 1 Nephi 2:2) and staying in a tent (see 1 Nephi 2:15). Jacob is the only writer to have quoted the entire allegory of the tame and wild olive trees (see Jacob 5), and King Benjamin is the only prophet who gives an extended sermon on service (see Mosiah 2). The uniqueness of these teachings to each author is what brings variety and enriches the Book of Mormon.

Lehi. In the thirty years of Lehi's life covered in the Book of Mormon,⁵ we see him teaching his children first at his home in Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 1). Then we see him in the wilderness as he begins his journey (see 1 Nephi 2), in a tent as his temporal residency (see 1 Nephi 2:15), and on the seashore (see 1 Nephi 17:5) as he prepares his family to cross the great deep to the promised land. We then picture Lehi teaching aboard a ship as he courageously leads his family across the great deep (see 1 Nephi 18:17). And finally, on his deathbed in the promised land, he continues to teach his family (see 2 Nephi 1–4).

Lehi's message is directed to a much smaller group than the other three authors' messages. Lehi initially teaches his nuclear family. Only later are they joined by Ishmael's family in addition to Zoram, Laban's servant. Lehi's teachings seem to be dominated by counsels and commandments directed to members of his family. Some specific instances are recorded in 2 Nephi 2 and 3, where Lehi addresses his two younger sons Jacob and Joseph respectively. We do not see Lehi traveling far and wide to preach and convert people.

From Nephi's record, we know that Lehi teaches his family by example about faith.⁶ For example, when he is asked to teach to the Jews, the Jews mock him, but he continues to teach because he knows that Lord had commanded him (1 Nephi 1:19–20). Shortly thereafter he is asked to "leave all of his earthly possessions and depart into the wilderness not knowing the extent of his journey or the trials he would face."⁷ Through these acts, Lehi teaches his children the extent of his faith in the direction of the Lord. When someone needs to go back to Jerusalem to get the records, it is not surprising that he counsels his faithful son Nephi, "Therefore go, my son, and thou shalt be favoured of the Lord" (1 Nephi 3:6). Lehi does teach his family in words as well as in deed, mostly focused on his role as a visionary prophet. He prophesies of the destruction of Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 1:18), the coming Messiah (see 1 Nephi 1:19; 10:4–6), and a future "choice seer" (see 2 Nephi 3:6). On a few occasions, Lehi teaches his family about how to communicate with

God through dreams and visions. 1 Nephi 8 contains one of those significant dreams Lehi sees and shares with his family. He also teaches the important doctrines of opposition in all things, the necessity of the Fall, and the gift of agency and that the purpose of humanity is to have joy (see 2 Nephi 2).

As a patriarch to his family he continues to teach even on his death bed. He concludes his ministry by blessing each of his own sons, Zoram, and the sons of Ishmael. Peterson observes that Lehi “pronounced his prophetic views upon them, extending that blessing unto their posterity for hundreds of years”⁸

Jacob. According to Robert J. Matthews, the boy Jacob could not be less than three or more than ten years old when Lehi’s family enters the ship.⁹ That means he would be familiar with the teachings of both his father, Lehi, and his older brother Nephi. Their teachings influence young Jacob’s religious commitment both in the land of his ancestors and in the promised land. He is ordained to the priesthood and set apart to ecclesiastical leadership by his brother Nephi (see 2 Nephi 6:2). Jacob later rears a family of his own, and he teaches them many times in “nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Enos 1:1). He also teaches in the temple (see Jacob 2–4), where he spends two days preaching the deep things of God to his people. The bulk of his recorded teachings come from this two-day conference.

Jacob’s audience is still small when compared to King Benjamin’s and Alma the Younger’s, but it is larger than Lehi’s. When Jacob becomes a leader and a teacher to his people, Nephi and Joseph are already married and have families, as do his other siblings. We can assume the same conclusion for Ishmael’s children and Zoram. This would mean the population has increased significantly from when Lehi initially presided over it. While more of Lehi’s teachings are conducted while they were on the move, the bulk of Jacob’s teachings take place near the temple.

According to C. Terry Warner, Jacob’s teachings are divided into three major sections: First, in 2 Nephi 6–11, Jacob bears his testimony of Christ as the Messiah and quotes from the prophecies of Isaiah. Second, he ministers to his people in the temple while presiding over the Church when he is about fifty years old (see Jacob 1:17).¹⁰ Jacob labors in this calling to consolidate the Church against forces of corruption and apostasy.¹¹ The third and final part of Jacob’s ministry (see Jacob 5–7) is a discourse directed toward those of us living in the latter days, rather than toward his contemporaries. Jacob hopes his record will be read by a future generation (see Jacob 4:3; 7:27). The largest

portion of his sermon is his recounting of the prophet Zenos's allegory of the olive tree. The allegory helps us understand the pains the Lord has taken in nurturing and reclaiming Israel.

John S. Tanner summarizes Jacob's teachings as "a truly impressive array of genres: vision, narrative, psalm, scriptural exegesis, allegory, sermon, prophecy, father's blessing, spiritual autobiography, and more."¹² Robert J. Matthews, describing Jacob's mannerisms and approach to teaching, adds this: "There have been few people in history who have possessed the combination of spirituality, intellectual capacity, judgment, literary ability, parentage, faith, and seership that Jacob did. He exhibited an inherent desire for righteousness. He was a plain-spoken man, but used very descriptive language in his teachings."¹³ As we review some of his teachings later, note how the descriptive nature of Jacob's writing is evident and unique.

King Benjamin. Unlike Lehi and Jacob, Benjamin was born in the promised land. As a father, Benjamin is blessed with three sons: Mosiah, Helorum, and Helaman. The text is clear that he loves his sons and takes upon himself the responsibility of teaching and educating them (see Mosiah 1:3), and he counsels other parents in his kingdom to do the same (see Mosiah 4:15).

People come to listen to him at a time when there is peace among his people (see Mosiah 1:1), which he has been responsible for bringing to pass (see Words of Mormon 1:12–18; Mosiah 2:4). His love and concern for his people cause him to devise various ways of making sure that his message is received. Once the people are on the temple grounds, he notices that there are too many to get near enough to hear him speak. So he builds a tower and speaks from it, but he finds that his voice is still not reaching all those who are in the assembled audience. Thus he causes his words to be written and distributed to the people (see Mosiah 2:7–8).

One of the main reasons he gives for addressing his people is that his mortal days are numbered (see Mosiah 1:9 and 2:28). As a prophet, a teacher, and a man full of love for his people, he wants to make sure that his people are fully fortified (see Mosiah 2:27–28).

Benjamin gives his message to a much bigger group than the earlier teachers. A large population presents a multiplicity of challenges. We are also aware that the crowd he addresses is living in a peaceful time in the history of the Nephites (see Mosiah 1:1). We further know that there are families in the crowd, which means a variety of age groups are present (see Mosiah 2:5). Such a diverse audience means that a variety of topics needs to be addressed.

The text makes it clear that Benjamin has a unique position in that he provides political and religious leadership simultaneously. He inherits political power, which includes ecclesiastical authority from his father, Mosiah (see Omni 1:23, 25). As a protector (see Words of Mormon 1:14), he successfully leads Nephites to war against Lamanites (see Omni 1:24). Amaleki, who is a keeper of records, trusts King Benjamin for his moral standing in society and gives him the title of a “just man” (see Omni 1:25). To inspire his people, including his sons, he chooses the temple located in the city of Zarahemla to give his landmark address. It is estimated that close to 25,000 people come to listen to the words of one they love and revere.¹⁴ King Benjamin uses examples gained from both political (see Mosiah 2:14) and religious experiences (see Mosiah 3:2). In his words, there is a sense that he understands the challenges of his people. He speaks as one of them, rather than as a leader who looks down upon his subjects with condescension and a life far removed from their own. John W. Welch finds Benjamin teaching his people to be effective because “Benjamin’s message combined the best of concerns for both poles in the typical dichotomies of life: the group and the individual, temporal affairs and spiritual matters, politics and theology, power and pleading, and recognizing both strengths and weaknesses. He spoke from a rich and wide spectrum of personal experience gained from his youth to his old age.”¹⁵

King Benjamin’s message and its impact on his sons and his people is covered in the book of Mosiah. Though the topics he covers in his ministry are varied—such as service to our fellow neighbors (see Mosiah 2:17) and the importance of priesthood (see Mosiah 6:3)—King Benjamin seems to have a thorough knowledge of the Savior and especially of his Atonement (see Mosiah 3). King Benjamin seals his teaching by giving his people a name, which he had promised to give when he first began his teaching (see Mosiah 5:7). Service dominates King Benjamin’s teaching, but he incorporates other teachings, such as reading of the scriptures, the role of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and the role of ordinances and covenants in our lives.

Alma the Younger. Like King Benjamin, Alma finds himself holding both political and spiritual leadership positions. He is a chief judge and a high priest (see Mosiah 29:42). At the time when he is a leader, the population has grown and has become scattered throughout the land. He defends his people through the word of God (see Alma 5) and by the sword (see Alma 2:29–33).

As a responsible leader, sensing the sorrowful state of his people, he resigns the position of chief judge and concentrates on being the high priest

over the Church (see Alma 4:18). Gerald Hansen Jr. points out that Alma “recognized the Nephites’ true needs and gave up the highest political office of the land.”¹⁶ As a result, he travels far and wide teaching (see Alma 5–15), baptizing (see Alma 4:4), and setting up churches (see Alma 15:13). His commitment to spreading the word of God causes him to wish that he were “an angel” (see Alma 29:1).

Alma travels extensively (like Paul of the Bible) and teaches in different settings: he teaches large crowds, small groups, and individuals. He is as effective in a crowd (see Alma 7) as he is one-on-one (see Alma 30). The effectiveness of his one-on-one teaching can especially be seen when he teaches Zeezrom, Nehor, and his own sons (see Alma 36–42). Alma teaches in synagogues, on riverbanks, inside a prison, in the wilderness, and in homes. His audience includes the poor (see Alma 32:12), the educated (see Alma 10:31), false teachers like Zeezrom (see Alma 30:12), and family members like his own sons (see Alma 36–42).

Because of this variety in audience, his teachings cover a vast number of subjects. Included in the assortment of topics he addresses are baptism, repentance, priesthood, ordination, prayer, the tree of life, the plan of redemption, a mighty change of heart, and the Redeemer. Hansen expands on this variety of places he teaches in and topics he addresses when he observes that in each of the places Alma travels, he finds a different level of preparation.¹⁷ Because of the differences in the preparedness of the people he taught, the variety of topics addressed in the Book of Mormon is articulated clearly in the writings of Alma. His travels and various audiences contribute to this variety in his message. For example, in Zarahemla the hearts of the people are lifted up in pride (see Alma 6:3), in Gideon the hearts of the people are not lifted in pride and they repent (Alma 7:6), and in Ammonihah Satan has a great hold on the people (see Alma 8:9–11).

Another factor that makes the teachings of Alma unique is that he finds himself in situations specific to missionaries. He is the only author among the four investigated here who teaches with a companion. Alma is also the only author who gives an extended sermon on priesthood (see Alma 13), the only author who talks about conversion because he is a beneficiary of a loving father who prayed that he might change his ways, and the only author who expands on what it means to be a missionary. Commenting on Alma 26, Elder F. Burton Howard, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, writes, “No one but a missionary could have written this story. Joseph Smith could never

have known what it was like to be a missionary to the Lamanites, for no one he knew had ever done such a thing before.”¹⁸

Although the teachings of the Book of Mormon prophets discussed above are unique to their specific situation, their teachings have several themes in common. However, they each teach these recurring themes in a way that is unique to them and their circumstances.

Treatment of Zenos

Of the four writers being discussed in this paper, only Lehi, Jacob, and Alma quote from Zenos’s writings. Zenos lived sometime between 1600 and 600 BC.¹⁹ His writings appeared in the Book of Mormon as quoted by various writers who were quoting from the brass plates.

These prophets have different reasons to use Zenos’s words: Lehi is traveling with the brass plates, and he relies on ancient records for spiritual feasting while on the arduous journey. Jacob is influenced by his father as a young boy. He would have been familiar with his father’s teachings and the content of those records because they were around him. Alma asks a question and relies on the written words for a response. Whether he reads directly from the records or quotes from memory is not clear from his record.

We are introduced to Zenos in Nephi’s record of his father’s teachings in 1 Nephi 19:10–16. In verse 10, Lehi teaches about the signs that would follow the death of Christ, which include the three days of darkness. In verse 12, Zenos described the destruction that will follow the death of Christ. Verse 16 introduces the gathering of the house of Israel.

Jacob quotes extensively from Zenos. In Jacob 5, he quotes Zenos word for word, making it the longest chapter in the Book of Mormon. John A. Tvedtnes observes that Jacob is greatly influenced by his father in all that he does, which includes the extensive use of Zenos’s words in his writings. For example, Jacob says in 2 Nephi 6:3, “I am desirous for the welfare of your souls,” while in Jacob 2:3 he speaks of his “anxiety for the welfare of your souls.” The word “anxiety” is also mentioned in Jacob 1:5 and 4:18. Tvedtnes reminds the readers that Lehi first uses the word “anxiety” when addressing his family in 2 Nephi 1:16: “And I desire that ye should remember to observe the statutes and the judgments of the Lord; behold, this hath been the anxiety of my soul from the beginning.”²⁰ Even though Jacob was young when his father was a teacher and a prophet to his people, he seems to remember clearly the language his father used and the way he loved the writings of

Zenos. Amongst the things Jacob remembers is how his father spoke about the gathering of Israel (see 1 Nephi 19:16), and to ensure that this message is not missed by future readers, he decides to quote the entire allegory about the gathering of the house of Israel as recorded in Jacob 5. Both Jacob and Lehi center their quotation of Zenos on gathering. The difference is the lengths of what they quoted: Lehi quotes one verse, and Jacob quotes what became the longest chapter in the Book of Mormon.

Alma takes a completely different approach. If people on the Hill Onidah (see Alma 32:4) had not told Alma that they could not worship their God because they had been cast out of their synagogues, we have no reason to believe that Alma would have taught them the words of Zenos as recorded in Alma 33:3–11. Alma begins by paraphrasing what they had told him: “Behold, ye have said that ye could not worship your God because ye are cast out of your synagogues. But behold, I say unto you, if ye suppose that ye cannot worship God, ye do greatly err, and ye ought to search the scriptures; if ye suppose that they have taught you this, ye do not understand them” (Alma 33:2). Following this comment, he then says to them, “Do ye remember to have read what Zenos, the prophet of old, has said concerning prayer or worship?” (Alma 33:3). From verses 4 to 11 he answers this question. It would appear that this record was nearby for him to have quoted when a question had been asked.

Jesus Christ, the Redeemer

As stated, the title page of the Book of Mormon claims that the book is written to “the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD.” This suggests that the primary message of the book is the saving role of Jesus Christ. The four authors highlighted in this paper do not disappoint on this front. However, there is variety in the ways they testify of Christ. For example, Lehi does not mention the Virgin Mary as the mother of Jesus. Jacob also has nothing to say about the birth of Christ. On the other hand, both King Benjamin (see Mosiah 3:8) and Alma (see Alma 7:9–10) call Mary by name. Note the similarities in how they refer to her: Benjamin says, “And [Jesus’] mother shall be called Mary,” whereas Alma says the same thing but in slightly different words: “he shall be born of Mary.”

Additionally, the authors we have investigated try to communicate the form Jesus Christ would take after he was born. Lehi and his son Jacob have nothing to say on this topic, except that Nephi testified that Jacob had seen

the Messiah (2 Nephi 11:3). King Benjamin and Alma talk about him dwelling in a mortal body, yet note the difference in how they phrase this concept. In Mosiah 3:5 King Benjamin says, “[He] shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay.” Alma 7:8, on the other hand, says, “The time of his dwelling in his mortal tabernacle.”

In holy writ, Jesus Christ is known by many names. Lehi starts by using the name Messiah (see 1 Nephi 10:4) and shortly thereafter he introduces the title “Redeemer of the world” (1 Nephi 10:5). Jacob joins other Nephite prophets and writers by referring to Jesus Christ as “the Holy One of Israel” (2 Nephi 6:9). He further reminds his readers of the role Christ played in the beginning when he calls him the “great Creator” (2 Nephi 9:5). In keeping with his reputation of using descriptive language, King Benjamin uses different names when he refers to Jesus Christ: Lord God Omnipotent (see Mosiah 3:21), the Father of heaven and earth (see Mosiah 3:8), the Creator (see Mosiah 3:8), the Savior (see Mosiah 3:20) and, of course, Jesus Christ (see Mosiah 3:8). Although Alma the Younger covers more pages than the other authors, he restricts himself to the following names when referring to Jesus Christ: Good Shepherd (see Alma 5:38), King of all the earth and the King of Heaven (see Alma 5:50), Only Begotten Son (see Alma 12:33), and Son of God (see Alma 33:17).

Lehi, King Benjamin, and Alma the Younger seem to be consistent in how they view the role of Jesus Christ. They see his coming as a fulfillment of the prophecies of the promised Messiah who would save a fallen people. Despite this common view among these prophets, they use different descriptive language. Lehi says, “All mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state, and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer” (1 Nephi 10:6). Lehi offers no such detailed description except to say that he would come, be the Redeemer, and be baptized (see 1 Nephi 10:4–10).

Once again, King Benjamin is a little more descriptive when speaking of Christ fulfilling the prophecies of a Messiah: “But men drink damnation to their own souls except they humble themselves and become as little children, and believe that salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent” (Mosiah 3:18). Alma is somewhat unique in his soteriology: “And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people” (Alma 7:12).

Resurrection

One of the missions of Jesus Christ is the Resurrection. The word “resurrection” appears eighty-one times in the Book of Mormon. This section of the paper will discuss how the word “resurrection” is used by the four prophets and writers. Lehi uses the word once: “The Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise” (2 Nephi 2:8). The verse tells us who is going to be resurrected and why he is going to be resurrected. Jacob makes the word “resurrection” a regular part of his discourse. We see this in 2 Nephi where the word appears seven times, with Jacob using it six of those times.

In the book of Jacob, Jacob uses the word three times. John Hilton III and Jana Johnson suggests that Jacob made it a regular part of his teachings “perhaps because Lehi had discussed the concept of resurrection with Jacob.”²¹ Hilton and Johnson further added that Jacob’s use of resurrection is uniquely Jacob’s and that no other prophet uses it the same way.²² Here are some examples: “power of the resurrection” is used on three occasions (2 Nephi 9:12; 10:25; Jacob 4:11), and “resurrection which is in Christ” is used twice (Jacob 4:11; 6:9).

King Benjamin does not use the word “resurrection” in his discourse, but this does not mean that he did not believe in or understand resurrection. Mosiah 3:10 sheds light on this observation when King Benjamin teaches, “And he shall rise the third day from the dead; and behold, he standeth to judge the world.” King Benjamin’s way of teaching about resurrection adds to the distinct and varied way of how prophets teach their audiences.

Alma uses the term “resurrection” more than any other prophet-writer: thirty-four times. Twenty-seven of those times are while he teaches his son Corianton in Alma 40. Why such a concentration of usage in a single chapter? Alma 40:1 helps us to answer this question. Alma began this chapter with these lines: “Now my son, here is somewhat more I would say unto thee; for I perceive that thy mind is worried concerning the resurrection of the dead.” One wonders, if Corianton had not been worried about resurrection, would Alma still have been known as the person who used the word “resurrection” most often?

Baptism

The four prophets discussed in this paper have an understanding of baptism. As Lehi teaches his family, he concentrates on John the Baptist's baptism of Jesus Christ: "He should baptize in Bethabara, beyond Jordan; and . . . he should baptize with water; even that he should baptize the Messiah with water" (see 1 Nephi 10:9). This prophecy of Christ was given between 600 and 592 BC, and it is significant because it tells us that the Nephite prophets knew about baptism. Lehi's faithful sons, Nephi and Jacob, also teach about baptism. In 2 Nephi 9:23 we read the following: "And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God." From the first amongst the Nephites, a prophet links baptism directly to faith and repentance. Furthermore, Jacob clarifies that baptism is a requirement to enter the kingdom of God.

At the end of King Benjamin's teachings, King Benjamin makes a record of the names of those who have entered into the covenant (see Mosiah 6:1). Prior to taking their names, he asks if they "believed the words which he had spoken unto them" (Mosiah 5:1). Their response indicates that they have entered into a covenant and participated in a baptismal ordinance even though it is not recorded as baptism, but "the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change" (Mosiah 5:2). They confirm this mighty change with these words: "And we are willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will" (Mosiah 5:5). These words sound like a baptismal covenant; however, in his teachings, the word "baptism" is not used.

Note that during this sermon, King Benjamin's audience is overcome by the Spirit: "we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2). In verse 3 we read that this happened "through the infinite goodness of God, and the manifestations of his Spirit." Joseph Smith Jr. taught, "Baptism has always been accompanied by the baptism of the Spirit, the gift of the Holy Ghost. You might as well baptize a bag of sand as a man, if not done in view of the remission of sins and getting of the Holy Ghost. Baptism by water is but half baptism and is good for nothing without the other half—that is, the baptism of the Holy Ghost."²³

The Book of Mormon preserves no record of Lehi, Jacob, or Benjamin conducting a baptismal ceremony. However, at the conclusion of King

Benjamin's teachings, his people entered into a covenant with their God. Pinegar and Allen comment on this verse, saying, "By what process is the name of Christ imparted to us? The miracle of the mighty change is more than a spiritual transformation—it is a covenant process. Faith and repentance are followed by requisite ordinances at the hands of authorized priesthood holders commissioned to baptize and impart the gift of the Holy Ghost. It is through this process that we come to be known under the name of Christ."²⁴ This differentiates King Benjamin from other authors discussed in this paper and from authors throughout the entire Book of Mormon.

Alma the Younger could have been there at the Waters of Mormon, observing his father teaching about baptism and baptizing those who believed his words. Later, as a missionary and a teacher, Alma the Younger invites all he teaches to show their commitment to the gospel through the baptismal ordinance. In Alma 5:62, Alma issues a personal invitation to members and nonmembers of the Church when he said, "Come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life." From this passage, we know that Alma understands that baptism is the fruit of repentance and that he also knows that it prepares one for eternal life. Alma 9:27 is recorded when there are still eighty-two years left before the Savior is born, but Alma reminds the people of Ammonihah that baptism is linked to Jesus Christ's doctrine when he says, "He cometh to redeem those who will be baptized unto repentance, through faith on his name." The final scripture dealing with baptism from Alma is in Alma 15:12–13. He baptizes Zeezrom and consecrates priests and teachers in the land of Sidom, and he challenges them to be baptized. Even though this is eighty-two years before the coming of Jesus Christ, we find Alma, like his father, baptizing people. Of the four writers and prophets being discussed, he is the only one who is recorded as actually performing baptisms.

Law of Chastity

Rodney Turner observes, "The Book of Mormon hardly mentions the purity of the marital relationship except on a very general way." He further argues, "Fidelity is simply assumed." Of the four writers discussed in this paper, Jacob and Alma discuss the sin of immorality (see Jacob 2:31–33; 3:5–7; Alma 39:3–14). Turner adds that other writers and prophets might have not specifically mentioned sexual sin by name because "the Ten Commandments

constituted a basic, general code of conduct of the Nephites as it did for the rest of Israel.²⁵

Lehi would have taught chastity to his people. We see this when Jacob is in the middle of his teachings on this subject, and right after mentioning various whoredoms he says, “Ye know that these commandments were given to our father, Lehi; wherefore, ye have known them before; and ye have come unto great condemnation; for ye have done these things which ye ought not to have done” (Jacob 2:34). This is a reminder to his people that this was not the first time chastity is being taught.

Jacob stands alone in giving an extended exhortation on sexual sins. Robert J. Matthews praises Jacob on his ability to teach: “His teachings on these subjects are among the best we have in the scriptures, not only for their content, but also for the directness of his message and the beauty and power of his language.”²⁶ Among the Book of Mormon writers and teachers, Jacob brings more clarity on the law of chastity as he uses different words and approaches to bring clarity to his readers. For example, he begins by talking about his uneasiness with the people’s thoughts (see Jacob 2:5) and the wickedness of their hearts (see Jacob 2:6).

To ensure that his hearers do not misunderstand his message, he becomes specific on what kind of sexual sins they were guilty of. In Jacob 2:24 he teaches, “Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord.” In Jacob 2:27, he brings to his people further clarity when he said, “For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none.” He then reminds them of how the Lord feels about women when he said, “For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women” (Jacob 2:28). Clarity on the law of chastity as taught by Jacob is further clarified in Jacob 3:12 when he says he is “warning them against fornication and lasciviousness, and every kind of sin, telling them the awful consequences of them.” If I had been in that audience, I would have left that temple clearly understanding what I had been taught.

King Benjamin, on the other hand, does not attack the issue of chastity with the same clarity as Jacob but talks about it generally, including it with other commandments that needed to be obeyed by his people. An example of this is recorded in Mosiah 2:13: “Neither have I suffered that ye should be confined in dungeons, nor that ye should make slaves one of another, nor that ye should murder, or plunder, or steal, or commit adultery; nor even have I

suffered that ye should commit any manner of wickedness, and have taught you that ye should keep the commandments of the Lord, in all things which he hath commanded you.”

Alma addresses the law of chastity with more clarity than Lehi and King Benjamin. Alma teaches far and wide and touches various subjects in his ministry. But toward the end of his fruitful life, he comes across a difficult situation in his own house. His son Corianton had been sent out on a mission to help convert the people of the land of Siron, but had left the ministry to follow a harlot (see Alma 39:3). Like Jacob above, Alma first highlights the condition of the heart when he says, “Yea, she did steal away the hearts of many; but this was no excuse for thee, my son” (Alma 39:4). Even though Corianton is guilty of only sexual sin, his loving father decides to stress the seriousness of this sin by reminding of other sins. This is what is recorded in Alma 39:5: “Know ye not, my son, that these things are an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost?” H. Dean Garrett mentions the following as the reasons why Alma mentions all these three sins to his son: first, to help his son fully understand the seriousness of his conduct, and second, to allow his son to fully understand the possibilities of repentance and forgiveness.²⁷

These Nephite prophets understand the consequences of breaking God’s laws. Since they all teach about the general keeping of the commandments, they also teach about the general blessings that come to the faithful using similar terminology: “And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper” (1 Nephi 2:20), a promise from the ancestor of the Nephites, Lehi. Other prophets give similar promises. Jacob gives a clear description of the consequences of breaking the law of chastity, writing, “Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives, and lost the confidence of your children, because of your bad examples before them; and the sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God against you. And because of the strictness of the word of God, which cometh down against you, many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds” (Jacob 2:35). In a clear warning directed to men who break the law of chastity, Jacob teaches that adultery does not only affect the spouse but the children as well. Some of us see daily these consequences in many modern families. Alma also teaches about the consequences of sexual sin, but he is more pointed to his son because it starts as an interview with him. He says, “Behold, O my son, how great iniquity ye brought upon the Zoramites; for

when they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words” (Alma 39:11). This warning continues to be true today for all teachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our conduct can either be a positive or a negative reinforcement of the truthfulness of the gospel to those who observe and look up to us.

Conclusion

Having reviewed the four authors selected for this study and the variety of their teachings, I conclude that the variety of teaching approaches in the Book of Mormon contributes to its richness and fulfills its mission of inviting us to come unto Christ. Variety continues to play a significant role to the modern Church. Since 1830, sixteen prophets have presided over the Church and have emphasized different aspects of the gospel in their ministry. For example, Joseph opened this dispensation with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the priesthood, while Brigham Young led the Saints to their new home in the West. Lorenzo Snow taught the importance of the law of tithing. Spencer W. Kimball received a revelation allowing all worthy men to receive the priesthood, and Ezra Taft Benson emphasized reading the Book of Mormon. Gordon B. Hinckley accelerated the building of temples and brought the Church out of obscurity through public affairs. And the current prophet, Thomas S. Monson, is known for his efforts to rescue those who are spiritually struggling. Despite the variation in each of these topics emphasized by different presidents of the Church, at the heart of each president’s teachings is an invitation to come unto Christ. **RE**

Notes

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4. John S. Tanner, “Literary Reflections on Jacob and His Descendants,” in *The Book of Mormon: Jacob through Words of Mormon, To Learn with Joy*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1990), 251.
5. Frederick W. Axelgard, “1 and 2 Nephi: An Inspiring Whole,” *BYU Studies* 26, no. 4 (1986): 54.
6. H. Donl Peterson, “Father Lehi,” in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1988), 55–66.
7. Peterson, “Father Lehi,” 59.
8. Peterson, “Father Lehi,” 64.

9. Robert J. Matthews, "Jacob: Prophet, Theologian, Historian," in *The Book of Mormon: Jacob through Words of Mormon, To Learn with Joy*, 35.
10. C. Terry Warner, "Jacob," *Ensign*, October 1976, 24.
11. Warner, "Jacob," 25.
12. Tanner, "Literary Reflections on Jacob and His Descendants," 251.
13. Matthews, "Jacob: Prophet, Theologian, Historian," 41.
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16. Gerald Hansen Jr., "The Book of Alma as a Prototype for Teaching the Word of God," in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1992), 263.
17. Hansen, "The Book of Alma as a Prototype for Teaching the Word of God," 263.
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