

# INTRODUCTION

**Charles Swift**

Both literally and figuratively, Samuel the Lamanite stands alone among the prophets of the Book of Mormon. Latter-day Saints who grew up within the tradition will likely remember illustrations of the Book of Mormon prophet standing dramatically on a wall, preaching the word of God amid a hail of stones and arrows, none of which hit the intended victim.

Despite the impressive dramatics of Samuel's short appearance in the Book of Mormon, surprisingly little academic writing has been produced about this Lamanite prophet. Perhaps because his story comprises so few chapters in the book, perhaps because the idea of a righteous Lamanite prophet is difficult to reconcile with an overall narrative theme of wicked Lamanites versus righteous Nephites, or perhaps for other reasons, Samuel has not received the literary or theological attention he deserves. This volume in the Book of Mormon Academy (BOMA) series is intended to correct this neglect.

Established in 2013 by the leadership of the Department of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University, BOMA was created as a consortium

of faculty drawn from BYU's Religious Education departments interested in discussing, researching, and writing about the Book of Mormon. Our first book published, *Abinadi: He Came Among Them in Disguise*, was an in-depth study of the teachings and story of Abinadi.<sup>1</sup> Our second, *Illuminating the Jaredites*, explored the record of the people of Jared and its influence on the Nephites and the Lamanites.<sup>2</sup> This third volume presents the reader with a careful look into the sermon and story of Samuel the Lamanite.

This volume is divided into four sections, each offering a different lens through which the reader may view the narrative of Samuel the Lamanite. In the first section, "Prophetic Lenses: Prophetic Voices from Ancient Israel and from the Book of Mormon," Avram Shannon discusses what it means to be a "prophet" in the Old Testament and then examines the concept of that term in the Book of Mormon with a particular focus on its implications for Samuel. Next, Kerry Hull examines Samuel's discussion of the prolonged days of the Lamanites, exploring this promise's precedent in biblical promises of lengthened life if one is obedient to God. The last chapter in this first section, written by Frank Judd, considers Samuel's prophecies in terms of a possible connection with the Joseph Smith Translation.

The second section, "Pedagogical Lens: Teaching the Sermon," offers the reader a perspective that would aid in determining how one might read the sermon with the view of teaching it to others. This section contains only one chapter, written by Ryan Sharp, but it is a chapter that provides a broad overview of much of the sermon of the Lamanite prophet and delves into important doctrines of the sermon that are often discussed in Latter-day Saint teaching settings.

The three chapters constituting the third section, "Cultural-Theological Lenses: The Good and Salvation," present the reader with a broad spectrum of ideas. The first author in this section, Daniel Becerra, writes about Samuel's teachings to the Nephites within the framework of the ethics of wealth found throughout the book. Deducing from Samuel's sermon that the Nephites might not have been keeping the law of Moses requirements related to wealth, he outlines those requirements to help frame Nephite behavior. Jan Martin, the next author, builds on Samuel's unique status as the only Lamanite prophet in the book. Drawing on both modern research and the words of Church leaders, among other sources, she develops an

approach to the text that analyzes how Samuel boldly confronts Nephite discrimination. Concluding this section is a chapter by Joseph Spencer, who performs a close reading of the Samuel text, a theological study of how the prophet teaches the Nephites about spiritual death. Through his detailed exegetical rigor, he guides us through the theological anthropology implicit in Samuel's sermon, in particular how spiritual death divides both Christ and human beings in two.

Our fourth section, "Literary Lenses: Narratives and Sources," provides a lens that helps readers appreciate how the Book of Mormon as a work of sacred literature utilizes literary devices while still being inspired scripture. My chapter is the first in the section, offering an analysis of a new type-scene that I call the returning prophet type-scene and suggesting that Samuel's variation of the scene is the most significant because of its uniquely potent foreshadowing of Christ's coming in the Book of Mormon. John Hilton and coauthors Sunny Hafen and Jaron Hansen follow with an analysis of possible sources for the words of Samuel. They examine the Book of Mormon sources that may appear in the prophet's sermon and how he used those words in specifically teaching the Nephites. The next author, Daniel Belnap, discusses the possibility that there were multiple sources and types of sources from which Mormon drew in abridging what we now know as Samuel's sermon in the Book of Mormon. And, in the concluding chapter of both this section and the book, Nicholas Frederick sees a parallel between Samuel's sermon and a form of early American speech known as the "jeremiad." He analyzes the sermon within that framework, then discusses what he sees as the implications of Samuel's jeremiad for the Book of Mormon's modern readers.

Following the four sections are two appendixes offering additional textual maps to assist with the exploration of the Samuel the Lamanite sermon. The first appendix, by Nicholas J. Frederick, Kerry Hull, and Joseph M. Spencer, offers a critical text of the sermon based on the 1840 edition of the Book of Mormon, the last overseen by the Prophet Joseph Smith. To accomplish this arduous undertaking, the three scholars closely examined each verse, noting intertextual and intratextual connections, textual revisions, and theological nuances. The second appendix, by Kerry Hull, presents the prophet Samuel's sermon in a poetic structure

conforming to common Hebrew poetry conventions. This work seeks to demonstrate the underlying poetic forms used to add balance, emphasis, and emotive effect to the prophetic message. Both of these appendixes will aid readers who desire to seriously delve into the rich and rewarding language of Samuel's discourse.

Though the number of chapters in which Samuel the Lamanite appears is but a small part of the Book of Mormon, it would be impossible to do justice to this great prophet and his teachings even in an entire volume. It is my hope as editor of this book that this collection of essays conveys the idea, among others, that when it comes to the account of the prophet Samuel, there is much more richness in the text than many of us readers may realize. When a narrative contains one-of-a-kind story elements, we cannot help but attribute a singular significance to it. This is certainly the case, for example, with the brother of Jared's vision of the premortal Savior, which holds a unique position in the book's collection of epiphanies. As important as it is that the prophet Samuel is the sole Lamanite prophet in the entire Book of Mormon, hopefully this volume also conveys that there is more singularity to Samuel beyond his singular racial status. He is one of a kind in more ways than one.

We in the Book of Mormon Academy offer our heartfelt gratitude to those who have made this volume possible. Our first and deepest gratitude extends to our families for their love and sacrifices that helped us contribute to this work. A special thanks is owed to the BYU Religious Education administration at the time that we worked on this book, particularly Dr. Daniel K Judd, dean of Religious Education, Dr. Dana M. Pike, chair of the Department of Ancient Scripture, and Dr. Shon D. Hopkin, who succeeded him as department chair during the publication process for this volume. We also thank our department secretary, Jeanine Ehat, for her never-ending help. We are thankful to everyone at the BYU Religious Studies Center who assisted in producing this book, including Dr. Scott C. Esplin, publications director, for his constant and professional support; Joany Pinegar, publications coordinator, for her help in making all the important details come together; and our editor, Don Brugger, along with editing intern Myla Parke, without whom this book would not be possible. We also express our appreciation to Brent Nordgren, design and production supervisor, for overseeing the book's design and helping make certain

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## NOTES

1. Shon D. Hopkin, ed., *Abinadi: He Came Among Them in Disguise* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018).
2. Daniel L. Belnap, ed., *Illuminating the Jaredites* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2020).