

“To the Convincing of the Jew and Gentile That JESUS Is the CHRIST”

Shon D. Hopkin

Shon D. Hopkin is an assistant professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University.

There are many purposes identified in the Book of Mormon text for its coming forth (see 1 Nephi 13:40; 15:12–18; 2 Nephi 3:12; 33:4; Ether 8:23–26; Mormon 9:31). The book’s central purpose, however, is found on its title page: “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD.”¹ Readers can look at each part of this statement—“Jesus is the Christ,” “Jew and Gentile,” and “to the convincing”—to glean a greater understanding of the Book of Mormon writers’ context and purpose in writing. From its first page to its last, it is easy to discern that Jesus is the book’s central character and that his divinity is its central message.² Truly the Book of Mormon is “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.”³

“JESUS Is the CHRIST”

The text of the Book of Mormon contains approximately one hundred titles for Jesus. It uses the given name “Jesus” approximately seventy times and the

title “Christ” almost four hundred times. What did the Book of Mormon authors mean when they said that Jesus is the Christ or the Messiah?

Book of Mormon writings are unambiguous in defining how the word *Messiah*, and later, *Christ* (the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Messiah*) should be understood; the writings are also clear about the kind of Messiah the people should expect. Nephite prophets knew their Messiah not as a powerful leader who would restore their political hopes, but as the “Redeemer” (1 Nephi 10:5) and “Savior of the world” (1 Nephi 10:4). They placed their future hopes for salvation squarely in him (see Mosiah 3:17). The Book of Mormon prophets desired not simply to testify that Jesus is the Christ; they wanted those who heard and read their words to know that he would save them from their sins if they put their trust in him.

The Book of Mormon contains teachings of ancient Israelite prophets such as Zenos, Zenock, and Neum, who taught plain truths about the nature and role of the Messiah. These teachings provide evidence that knowledge about the Messiah existed in ancient Israel (see 1 Nephi 19:10–16 and Alma 33:13–19). Furthermore, Nephite prophets declared that all of the holy Israelite prophets taught about the Messiah (see 1 Nephi 10:5; Jacob 4:4–5; Mosiah 13:33; Alma 33:14; Helaman 8:11–23). Lehi’s family’s understanding was obtained through direct revelation, either to reinforce existing knowledge, or to provide them with truths that were not known by the majority of Israelites in that day. Before Lehi left Jerusalem (circa 600 BC), he was blessed with a vision of the Messiah (see 1 Nephi 1:9). Lehi later prophesied of the time of the Messiah’s coming, baptism, death, resurrection, and mission as Savior and Redeemer of the world (see 1 Nephi 10:4–11).

These early teachings formed the foundation of the Nephite understanding of the Messiah. Visions and revelations given to Nephi (see 1 Nephi 11:20–33) and Jacob (see 2 Nephi 10:3) reinforced and augmented Lehi’s teachings and influenced the way that Nephite prophets read and taught the words of Israelite prophets such as Isaiah (see 1 Nephi 19:23; 2 Nephi 11:2). Later prophets such as King Benjamin (see Mosiah 3), Alma (see Alma 33), Samuel (see Helaman 13), Mormon (see Mormon 7), Moroni (see Mormon 8–9), and others continued building upon this early foundation.⁴ Jesus’ personal visit to Book of Mormon peoples in 3 Nephi fulfilled all earlier Messianic hopes and expectations.

There are many explanations for why the Nephite teachings about the Messiah are so much more pointed and clear than those found in the Old Testament. Nephi explained that he saw the loss of many “plain and precious things” from the biblical record (1 Nephi 13:28). He expressed a preference for “plainness” (2 Nephi 25:4) in teaching that likely influenced later Book of Mormon prophets. Perhaps the greatest influence on the Christ-centered teachings of the Book of Mormon, though, is the book’s future-oriented nature. The main Nephite prophet-writers of the Book of Mormon—Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni—saw this day and wrote directly to modern readers (see 1 Nephi 14:23–28; Mormon 7:1–10; Mormon 8:34–35), anticipating their most pressing needs and the best ways to reach them. As stated by President Ezra Taft Benson, “[One] reason why we must make the Book of Mormon a center focus of study is that it was written for our day. The Nephites never had the book; neither did the Lamanites of ancient times. It was meant for us. . . . Each of the major writers of the Book of Mormon testified that he wrote for future generations.”⁵ The Book of Mormon authors primarily identified this modern audience, as described on the title page, as “Jew and Gentile.”

“Jew and Gentile”

What did the titles “Jew” and “Gentile” signify for the Book of Mormon authors? Although the Book of Mormon was written “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile,” elsewhere on the title page and in the Book of Mormon the text broadens this dual designation to include three distinct groups: Jews, Gentiles, and descendants of Lehi (known in the latter days by the title “Lamanites”; see title page; 1 Nephi 13:39). Together these three groups constitute “all men” (1 Nephi 6:4). This three-fold division can be clearly seen in the teachings of Nephi (see 1 Nephi 13:38–39; 2 Nephi 25–26, 30), Mormon (see Words of Mormon 1:8; 3 Nephi 29–30; Mormon 7:1–10), and Moroni (see Mormon 8–9).

The title “Jews” in the Book of Mormon is affixed to individuals from Jerusalem who would be destroyed and taken captive by the Babylonians (see 2 Nephi 6:8; 25:9–10), individuals who would be delivered from Babylonian captivity and return to build up Jerusalem (see 2 Nephi 6:9; 25:11), and individuals who would reject the Messiah and consequently be scattered into all the world (see 2 Nephi 6:9–11; 25:12–16). The Lord would bring forth

the Book of Mormon, “convincing them of the true Messiah,” the one they first rejected (2 Nephi 25:17–18). Lehi’s posterity, who were descendants of Joseph of Egypt, can also rightfully be identified as Jews because they were citizens of the Kingdom of Judah—they came out of Jerusalem (see 2 Nephi 33:8). In this sense Lehi’s posterity can be identified as a “subset” of the Jews, and the designation “Jew and Gentile” would then represent all of God’s children.

The “Gentiles” are associated with those who were led by God to the Americas (see 2 Nephi 13:12–19), those who persecuted the descendants of the Jews and the Lamanites (see 1 Nephi 13; 2 Nephi 29:5; 3 Nephi 29:8), those who would live in a day of wickedness and apostasy (see 2 Nephi 27:1; 28), those who would receive the fullness of the gospel and carry the Book of Mormon to others (see 1 Nephi 13:38; 15:13–16; 2 Nephi 30:3), and those who would be identified today as Christians (see 1 Nephi 13:19–23; 2 Nephi 26:20). The Gentiles are commanded to “hear the words of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God” so that they “may be numbered with [Christ’s] people who are of the house of Israel” (3 Nephi 30:1–2). Within Nephi’s last recorded words in the Book of Mormon, he wrote, “And as I spake concerning the convincing of the Jews, that Jesus is the very Christ, it must needs be that the Gentiles be convinced also that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God” (2 Nephi 26:12). For some among the Gentiles, this convincing consists of clarifying and augmenting their knowledge in the true Christ of the Bible, a God who continues to work great miracles according to the faith of humankind (see Mormon 9:6–7).

“To the Convincing”: Why?

Why was a scriptural account needed to convince the world of the mission of Jesus the Christ? The Book of Mormon prophetically anticipates a time when “Jew and Gentile” would either not believe in Christ, or would believe in a Christ whose identity had become diluted and distorted. Its prophets recognized a need to “convince” that audience of the true nature of Jesus Christ. As recipients of the Book of Mormon and the teachings of modern prophets, most Latter-day Saints understand Christ’s biblical identity through that lens. Although they are aware that most Jews do not believe in Jesus as the Christ, some Latter-day Saints are not aware of how some modern scholarship has drawn varying conclusions regarding the truthfulness

and meaning of biblical accounts, based in part on evidence of problems with early biblical manuscripts.

In his bestselling book, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, influential biblical scholar Bart Ehrman openly describes the challenge to his faith in the biblical message when he confronted the varying witnesses of ancient texts. Ehrman states:

In short, my study of the Greek New Testament, and my investigations into the manuscripts that contain it, led to a radical rethinking of my understanding of what the Bible is. This was a seismic change for me. Before this . . . my faith had been based completely on a certain view of the Bible as the fully inspired, inerrant word of God. Now I no longer saw the Bible that way. The Bible began to appear to me as a very human book. Just as human scribes had copied, and changed, the texts of scripture, so too had human authors originally *written* the texts of scripture. This was a human book from beginning to end. . . . It is a radical shift from reading the Bible as an inerrant blueprint for our faith, life, and future to seeing it as a very human book, with very human points of view, many of which differ from one another and none of which provides the inerrant guide to how we should live. This is the shift in my own thinking that I ended up making, and to which I am now fully committed.⁶

Although many biblical scholars remain fully committed to faith in Jesus’ divinity, others have viewed differences within the biblical text and among ancient biblical manuscripts as evidence that Jesus’ original identity was obscured or altered by later believers; these scholars have made numerous proposals regarding that original identity, including that he was a simple, peasant reformer,⁷ a Cynic philosopher,⁸ or even a magician.⁹

Because Nephi envisions a time when truths would be lost from the Bible (see 1 Nephi 13:26–27), most Latter-day Saints would not completely reject the claims of these scholars, recognizing that the Bible’s message regarding Jesus may be at least partially incomplete, needing support and clarification. The Book of Mormon message was designed by its ancient authors to provide precisely that type of support, clarifying and strengthening the biblical message of Jesus as the divine Son of God (see 1 Nephi 13:40–41). Book of Mormon authors saw and anticipated this need and crafted their message “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile” in the last days.

The primary goal was not simply to witness that Jesus is the Messiah; it was to *convince* the reader of the truth of that witness. Under the direction of the Lord, the Book of Mormon prophets maintained a clear vision of this goal, and they purposefully and strategically crafted their message to give future audiences the greatest possible chance of being persuaded by that witness. This truth can be seen when tracing the passing of the plates from author to author. The first prophet-writer of the Book of Mormon, Nephi, openly describes his goals early in his account: “For the *fulness* of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved” (1 Nephi 6:4, emphasis added). After stating his intent, he gives clear directions: “Wherefore, I shall give commandment unto my seed, that they shall not occupy these plates with things which are not of worth unto the children of men” (1 Nephi 6:6). This “commandment”—to use the plates in order to persuade men to come unto Christ—had a direct impact on the writing of those who would follow. The thread is explicit from Nephi (see 2 Nephi 33:4) to Jacob (see Jacob 1:1–4, 7) to Enos (see Jacob 7:27), to Amaleki (see Omni 1:26), through Mormon’s Christ-centered abridgment of the “large” plates of Nephi, to Moroni’s closing words (see Moroni 10:30, 32).

“To the Convincing”: How?

Book of Mormon authors such as Nephi (see 1 Nephi 6:6), Mormon (see Helaman 3:14; Mormon 5:8; 3 Nephi 26:6), Moroni (see Ether 15:53), and others (see Jarom 1:14; Jacob 3:13) show a sensitivity to space limitations on the plates. Mormon repeats three different times the idea that “this book cannot contain even a hundredth part of what was done” (3 Nephi 5:8).¹⁰ In these statements, they are emphasizing that the concepts that they choose to include are vitally important, and that their choices were made through the filtering lens of their overarching purposes. With these special limitations in mind, the concepts they chose to include regarding Christ take on increased significance, not simply as details included by happenstance, but as purposeful additions targeting precisely those areas in which their audience’s understanding of the Savior would need to be strengthened.

How did the various authors of the Book of Mormon carry out their explicitly stated mission to convince and persuade? The remainder of this chapter will provide examples of how the Book of Mormon convinces

readers to come unto Christ listed under seven subheadings. The subheadings were conceived through analysis of the interaction between three variables: purpose, audience, and text.

1. Authors affirm key biblical events in Jesus' life, including the virgin birth, his baptism, his miracles, his Atoning sacrifice, his Crucifixion, and his Resurrection.

The Book of Mormon prophets have little to say regarding Jesus' parables or the details of his conflict with the Jewish leaders of his time. The only repetition of teachings from his mortal ministry come directly from Jesus himself during his visits in 3 Nephi 11–28, centering most prominently on the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5–8; 3 Nephi 12–14). When the Book of Mormon prophets do speak of Christ's mortal ministry, they instead choose to confirm its central events. True to Nephi's desire for “plainness” (1 Nephi 13:29), the examples they provide are not ambiguous or open to multiple interpretations. They result from visions (see 1 Nephi 1:8; 1 Nephi 11) or direct revelation, often through the teachings of angels (see 1 Nephi 19:8; 2 Nephi 6:9; Mosiah 4:1). These confirmations are primarily provided by Nephi (see 1 Nephi 11); Benjamin (see Mosiah 3); Abinadi (see Mosiah 15); Alma (see Alma 7); and Jesus himself (see 3 Nephi 11); with key events also affirmed by Lehi (see 1 Nephi 1; 10); Jacob (see 2 Nephi 9); Zenos, Zenock, and Neum (see 1 Nephi 19:10); Amulek (see Alma 34); and Samuel (see Helaman 13).

The book begins with Lehi's vision of “one descending out of the midst of heaven” (1 Nephi 1:9). Nephi, King Benjamin, and Alma all teach of Jesus' descent from heaven and of the virgin birth through his mortal mother, Mary (see 1 Nephi 11:13–21; Mosiah 3:8; Alma 7:10). Lehi also speaks of the ministry of John the Baptist (see 1 Nephi 10:7–8), who would baptize Jesus “in Bethabara, beyond Jordan” (1 Nephi 10:9). Nephi writes of John (see 1 Nephi 11:27), teaching that he would perform Jesus' baptism “by water, to fulfil all righteousness” (2 Nephi 31:5), and that the Holy Ghost would come as a confirming witness “in the form of a dove” (1 Nephi 11:27; 2 Nephi 31:8). Lehi and Nephi both provide witness of the calling and ministry of the twelve apostles (see 1 Nephi 1:10; 11:29; 12:9). Abinadi affirms that Jesus worked “many mighty miracles among the children of men” (Mosiah 15:6). Nephi speaks of the healing of the sick and casting out

of devils (see 1 Nephi 11:31), and Benjamin adds that these miracles would include “healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases. And he shall cast out devils” (Mosiah 3:5–6).

Book of Mormon prophets testified of the suffering Jesus experienced, in order “to succor” (Alma 7:12) his people, teaching that he “suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people,” as had been taught by Isaiah (Mosiah 15:5, explaining Isaiah 53). The book emphasizes the depth of his suffering, including “temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death” (Mosiah 3:7; see also Alma 7:11), confirming the witness from the Gospel of Luke (see Luke 22:44) that “blood cometh from every pore” (Mosiah 3:7) due to the depth of his anguish. Most significantly, multiple Book of Mormon prophets affirm the reality of Jesus’ judgment at the hands of the Jewish leaders, his crucifixion and death, and his resurrection from the dead (see 1 Nephi 10:11; 11:32–33; 19:10; Mosiah 3:9–10; 15:7; Alma 7:12; Helaman 14:15; 3 Nephi 11:11–15; and others). Such affirmation is one of the ways in which Book of Mormon authors seek to convince readers that Jesus is the Christ.

2. Authors affirm, clarify, and strengthen key biblical teachings regarding the role and identity of Christ, including his divinity, his earthly mortality, and his ability to comprehend all because of his suffering and his substitutionary Atonement.

Although the Book of Mormon’s witness of key events from Jesus’ life is important as a joint-witness with the Bible, its main purpose in recounting these events is to testify of Christ’s identity. The main purpose for teaching of Jesus’ descent from heaven and miraculous birth is to witness that he is God (see Mosiah 13:28; Ether 3:14), the Son of God who was born into mortality (see 1 Nephi 11:7; Mosiah 3:8; 15:2; Alma 34:2–5; Helaman 3:28; 3 Nephi 20:31; Mormon 9:22; and many others). Jesus is not only the Son of God, due to his mortal birth, but is also the Everlasting Father (see 2 Nephi 19:6) due to his conception “by the power of God” and his acceptance of his Father’s will (Mosiah 15:2–3; 3 Nephi 1:14), his role as Creator (see Mosiah 3:8; 4:2), and his ability through the Atonement to provide spiritual rebirth to fallen mankind (see Mosiah 5:7). Thus, in this context, he is both the

Father and the Son (see Mosiah 15:2–3; Mormon 9:12; Ether 3:14), often referred to as the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth (see Mosiah 3:8; Helaman 14:12; 16:18; Ether 4:7).

Book of Mormon prophets emphasized his mortal suffering and crucifixion in order to persuade their readers that Jesus had atoned for their sins. The writers emphasized this so that readers could receive forgiveness through faith in his name and so that they would know that there was one who could understand their own sufferings (see Mosiah 15:7; Alma 7:11–12; 34:8–9). The writers repeatedly pointed to the reality of his resurrection so that their readers would believe that he could save them from death (see 2 Nephi 9:5–6; Alma 40:2–3). They regularly used titles for Jesus that point to his role as the one who would rescue humankind, purchasing everyone through the blood of his atoning sacrifice. Clear, pointed titles in the Book of Mormon include “Savior” (12 times), “Messiah” (32 times), the “Lamb of God” (35 times), “Redeemer” (41 times), “Son of God” (51 times), and Messiah’s Greek equivalent “Christ” (385 times). Their description of Jesus Christ was designed, much like the Book of Hebrews in the New Testament, to produce awe in his majesty, reverence for his sacrifice, peace and comfort from his suffering, and faith in his power to save. There is no space provided in the Book of Mormon for any debate over identity—he is the Son of God and Savior of the world, not a magician, peasant revolutionary, philosopher, or simply a great moral teacher. Book of Mormon prophets learned of Jesus’ identity through vision and revelation. Their witness would either be believed or disbelieved by future readers, but it leaves no room to be misunderstood.

*3. Authors speak as true, historical witnesses—
witnesses who have either seen Jesus face-to-face or have
experienced his miraculous power in their own lives.*

An important part of the convincing power of the Book of Mormon prophets is their personal, direct proclamation that they have experienced Jesus’ ability to save and that they stand as personal witnesses of his reality. Many of these prophets saw Jesus face-to-face, confirming the New Testament witnesses of Jesus’ divinity and his resurrection. Examples of Book of Mormon prophets and other individuals in the narrative who either had personal visions of Christ or who heard his voice include Lehi (see 1 Nephi 1:9), Nephi

(see 1 Nephi 11:21; 2 Nephi 11:2), Jacob (see 2 Nephi 11:3), Enos (see Enos 1:10), Alma the Elder (see Mosiah 26:14), King Lamoni (see Alma 19:13), Ammon (see Alma 20:2), Alma the Younger (see Alma 36:22), Samuel (see Helaman 13:3), others named Nephi (see Helaman 10; 3 Nephi 1; 11), Mormon (see Mormon 1:15; 3:14), over 2,500 present during Jesus' visitation (see 3 Nephi 17:25), the brother of Jared (see Ether 3:20), and Moroni (see Ether 12:39). During his discourse on faith, Moroni encourages all to believe that they can also come to know Christ, listing numerous witnesses who have seen him and promising readers that this can be the result of their faith (see Ether 12:7, 8, 12, 19–21, 31, 39).

Not only do they testify that they have seen or heard Christ, the Book of Mormon prophets also regularly record the change that was effected in their own lives or the lives of others through Jesus Christ. For example, Enos related that his sins were swept away because of this faith in Jesus Christ (see Enos 1:5–8). Providing one of the most poignant experiences in the Book of Mormon, Alma the Younger states:

I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!

Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy. (Alma 36:18–21)

King Benjamin's people received a mighty change of heart (see Mosiah 5:2), the burdens of Alma the Elder's people were lightened by God (see Mosiah 24:13–15), Zeezrom had a miraculous recovery and discovered joy in Christ (see Alma 15:10–11), Ammon was overcome by his joy in Christ (see Alma 27:17–18), and Ammon's people declared that God took away their guilt (see Alma 24:12).

All of these experiences can be seen as preparatory for the most sublime of scenes in the Book of Mormon—the appearance of the resurrected

Savior to his people. Jesus teaches them, prays with them, and heals their children. He loves them and provides them with unforgettable experiences (see 3 Nephi 11–28).

These witnesses of Christ are provided by real people who understood their joy as coming directly from Christ. They write glowingly and powerfully of their experiences, persuasively giving evidence of the joy and peace that come through Jesus Christ. Reading their stories and experiences personalizes the Christ-centered message of the Book of Mormon for its readers.

4. Authors nuance their discourse depending on their audience, whether Jew or Gentile, to emphasize doctrinal points, evidences, future events, and invitations that will be particularly important to that group.

The Book of Mormon authors purposefully wrote for three future audiences—Jews, Gentiles, and “Lamanites”—and nuanced their message in different ways to focus on the varying needs of those three groups (or those two groups, if the future “Lamanites”—actually a composite of Lamanite and Nephite descendants—are considered a subset of the “Jews”). Since they desired to write to “all men” (2 Nephi 26:27–30), many of their words to each group can be generalized to all, giving all an invitation to come unto Christ. Yet the focus of their discourse to each group shows an awareness of the types of evidences and invitations that will most effectively communicate with each broad group.

To the Jews

As the first author of the Book of Mormon, Nephi shows an awareness of the needs of varying groups early in his record. The account of his family’s journey to the promised land connects with exodus themes that would have been particularly familiar to his Jewish audience. Laman and Lemuel do not simply disagree with or fight against the journey, they “murmur” against the journey’s designated leaders (see Exodus 15:24; 1 Nephi 2:11–12; 3:5, 31; 4:4; 16:3; 17:17, 22, 49; 18:16; 2 Nephi 5:3). They are led through the wilderness by the Liahona, paralleling God’s guidance in the cloud and the pillar of fire (see Exodus 13:21; 1 Nephi 16). Rather than being given manna from heaven and water out of a rock, their meat is made sweet in the midst of their adversities (see Exodus 16–17; 1 Nephi 17:2). Like Moses, Nephi went

up on a mount and brought a pattern back down (see Exodus 19; 1 Nephi 17:7–17). There is the crossing of water in a miraculous fashion (see Exodus 14; 1 Nephi 18). They are moving towards a promised land (see 1 Nephi 2:20). Nephi’s discourse consistently refers to Moses and the miracles that were wrought at his hands (see 1 Nephi 4:1–5), connecting with future Jewish readers.

Nephi turns almost exclusively in 2 Nephi to discursive efforts of persuasion regarding the identity of Christ. In 2 Nephi 11 he restates his primary goal: “My soul delighteth in proving unto my people that save Christ should come all men must perish” (v. 6). He then quotes extensively from Isaiah in order to provide a foundation for his efforts. This lengthy quotation from the great Jewish prophet prepares the way for his discourse to his “brethren” (2 Nephi 25:20), the Jews.

Nephi begins that discourse (in 2 Nephi 25) by stating that he has lived in Jerusalem, and understands the Jews clearly because of that background (see 2 Nephi 25:1–6). He is thus able to direct his comments to them using the full force of that understanding. He describes the long history of persecution to which the Jewish people have been subjected “from generation to generation according to their iniquities” (v. 9), including the Babylonian destruction and the future return of the Jews to their land. The Jews will fail to recognize the true Messiah for whom they so anxiously wait. Nephi describes who that Messiah is—the one that will be crucified by them and then will rise from the dead (vv. 12–13). He then goes on to describe the Roman destruction of the Jews and their scattering abroad by many nations (v. 15).

Nephi, having come “out from Jerusalem” (2 Nephi 25:5; 33:8), identifies with the concerns of the future Jewish people who find themselves scattered throughout the world, and he then states the solution: God will proceed to do a marvelous work in the last days. The marvel will begin with the publication of “his words [the Book of Mormon] unto them . . . for the purpose of convincing them of the true Messiah, who was rejected by them” (v. 18). He uses messianic examples with which the Jews would identify—the story of the brass serpent and the bringing of water from a rock by Moses—to testify that “there is none other name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ, of which I have spoken, whereby man can be saved” (v. 20). After all his efforts to identify who the Messiah is that the modern Jews

should worship, this is his most pointed statement: he provides the name by which the Messiah would be recognized in the last days, “Jesus Christ” (v. 19), speaking to the Jews in language that they could recognize.¹¹ Nephi leaves no space for misunderstanding to whom he is referring.¹²

Other Book of Mormon prophets used Nephi’s model for persuading the Jews, using language with which they would identify. They recount the Jews’ Babylonian captivity and return, their rejection of the Messiah and subsequent scattering, and call them to believe in Christ in the last days, clearly identifying him as the crucified Son of God (see, for example, Lehi’s teaching in 1 Nephi 10:2–11 and Jacob’s teachings in 2 Nephi 6–10). Additionally, they rely on Old Testament stories such as the brazen serpent (see Alma 33:19–20; 37:46; Helaman 8:14–15) and Abraham’s near-sacrifice of Isaac (see Jacob 4:5), on the Messianic nature of the law of Moses sacrifices (see Jacob 4:5; Mosiah 13:31; Alma 34:13; 3 Nephi 15:4–6), and on the teachings of Old Testament prophets such as Isaiah (see 2 Nephi 7–8; Mosiah 13; 3 Nephi 22) to show that their own prophets of old had foreseen the mission of Jesus Christ, stating that “all the holy prophets” had taught of him (Jacob 4:4; Mosiah 15:11; Alma 30:44; 3 Nephi 1:26; 26:3).

Jacob’s use of Zenos’s allegory of the olive tree (see Jacob 4–6) and Abinadi’s use of Isaiah 53 (see Mosiah 12–15) both stand as exemplary efforts to draw the Jews into the message of the Book of Mormon. After using the allegory of the olive tree to show how the Jews, “after having rejected the sure foundation, can ever build upon it, that it may become the head of their corner” (Jacob 4:17), Jacob concludes with a last persuasive effort. He provides an account of Sherem, one who held rigidly to the precepts of the law of Moses, and who accuses the Nephite Christians of converting “the law of Moses into the worship of a being which ye say shall come many hundred years hence” (Jacob 7:7), mirroring Jewish concerns. In the end, Sherem becomes convinced that Christ will come and confesses the truth of Christ before the people (see Jacob 7:17). Abinadi shows from their own scriptures that the Messiah would suffer the sins of all people (see Mosiah 14:6; Isaiah 53:6) in order to save “his seed” (Mosiah 14:10; Isaiah 53:10).

To the Gentiles

After directly addressing the Jews in 2 Nephi 25, Nephi turns to repeat prophecies concerning the future of the Gentiles that he had already

provided from his vision (see 1 Nephi 13–14). Nephi states, “As I spake concerning the convincing of the Jews, that Jesus is the very Christ, it must needs be that the Gentiles be convinced also that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God” (2 Nephi 26:12). The nuanced difference is crucial: the Jews need to be convinced that Jesus is the Christ; the Gentiles need to be convinced of the correct identity of Jesus Christ, “the Eternal God.”

Nephi begins by recounting how the Gentiles would persecute the descendants of Lehi, and how the Gentiles would be lifted up in the pride of their eyes to build “up many churches; nevertheless, they put down the power and miracles of God, and preach up unto themselves their own wisdom and their own learning, that they may get gain and grind upon the face of the poor” (2 Nephi 26:20). The problem is Gentile apostasy and wickedness, and Nephi again proclaims that the solution is the “marvelous work and a wonder” that will be initiated with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 27:26). He foresees all of the reasons why the Gentiles might reject the convincing message of the Book of Mormon: divisive loyalty to their own religious denominations (see 2 Nephi 28:3), a denial of the Holy Ghost (v. 4), a denial of miracles (v. 5), a misunderstanding of God’s mercy and justice that denies a need to repent (vv. 7–8), pride (v. 9), false teachers (v. 9), false doctrines (v. 9), and a sense of loyalty to the Bible that does not allow for additional revelation (see 2 Nephi 29:4). His words are designed to counteract these powerful influences, and to persuade the Gentiles to open their hearts to the miraculous, revelatory message of the Book of Mormon. He speaks directly to them, crying out, “O, ye Gentiles” (v. 5).

In fact, Nephi promises that repentant Gentiles can become numbered among the house of Israel (see 2 Nephi 29:2). He then finishes his lengthy, persuasive discourse, speaking of both Jews and Gentiles. He shows how, preparatory to the millennium of peace, the important division will not be between Jew and Gentile, but will instead be between the righteous and the wicked (see 2 Nephi 26:10). Nephi is working to draw both groups together into faith in Christ, so that they can be saved rather than destroyed at the second coming.

Both Mormon (see 3 Nephi 29) and Moroni (see Mormon 8–9; Ether 12; Moroni 10) also speak directly to the Gentiles, repeating themes first introduced by Nephi, warning them of their future state of pride and

wickedness, and promising them inclusion with the house of Israel if they will repent (see 3 Nephi 30:2).

5. Authors reveal the weaknesses and challenges of each audience, stating them plainly in ways that could only be possible if God had truly spoken to them, seeking to build trust with that audience in the reality that God exists and knows them.

As discussed, Nephi and other prophets speak plainly to the Jews and Gentiles about their future sins and state of blindness, boldly demonstrating that the writers knew their readers’ hearts hundreds of years before any would read their words. This emphasis on a prophetic knowledge of hidden things matches an effective approach used by Amulek, and was possibly included in the Book of Mormon in order to model one of its methods to persuade and convince. When preaching to the hard-hearted Zeezrom, Amulek reveals things about Zeezrom that he could only have known through revelation. Zeezrom is shocked by this evidence that God really does exist and knows him (see Alma 11:46; 12:3). The awareness that his sins are real and are not hidden from God precipitates a crisis of faith for Zeezrom that leads him to be healed by faith in Christ (see Alma 15:5–12).

Both Mormon (see 3 Nephi 29–30) and Moroni’s messages to the Gentiles show a detailed awareness of the challenges that the Gentiles will face. In the first of three farewell addresses, Moroni reveals conditions that will exist in the day the Book of Mormon comes forth (see Mormon 8:26–32). In that day there will be murderous, secret combinations (v. 27), and the people will be full of all types of sin (v. 31). Presumably addressing an audience who will be identified as Christians, Moroni foretells that many churches will exist, some designed purposefully for material gain (vv. 32–33). The people will pollute “the holy church of God” (vv. 36–38) and ignore those in true need (v. 39). After briefly addressing a group who does not believe in Christ (see Mormon 9:1–6)—possibly either the Jews or Gentile nonbelievers—Moroni returns to those who believe in Jesus, but deny “the revelations of God,” saying that they are “done away.” They would also deny the gifts of the Spirit and God’s miracles (v. 7). He invites them to repent and to believe in a God of miracles (v. 27). He foresees that some will be tempted to reject his words because of perceived imperfections (v. 31), a

concern that is forcefully repeated in his second farewell address (see Ether 12). In Moroni's final farewell (see Moroni 10), he gives a warning, that he—the prophet who knows the desires of their hearts—will meet readers of the Book of Mormon at the judgment day (v. 34). The Book of Mormon prophets' demonstration of a knowledge of hidden things may be—at least in part—an effort to reach a hardened future audience whose sins are exposed by the book in miraculous ways.

6. Through the authors' efforts in recording scripture, in speaking to a future audience, and in seeking revelation on their behalf, they build the audience's trust in their loving message regarding Christ.

The overwhelming sentiment that prevails throughout the Book of Mormon is of loyalty to God and of deep love and concern for those of the last days. Throughout the often momentous challenges of their daily lives, the Book of Mormon prophets struggled valiantly and humbly to engrave scriptures that would not be used by their own people. Deeply aware of their weakness as they worked to engrave their words upon a limited supply of plates of metal, they openly confessed their own flaws (see 2 Nephi 33:1; Ether 12:24) but forged ahead, proclaiming their love for a future generation. Nephi wrote: "I have charity for the Jew. . . . I also have charity for the Gentiles" (2 Nephi 33:3, 8–9). Moroni confirms the love of Book of Mormon prophets for future generations: "And [God] knoweth their prayers, that they were in behalf of their brethren" (Mormon 8:24). Moroni's love is palpable in his final farewell address, pleading with a future people to "come unto Christ, and be perfected in him" (Moroni 10:32). Although they were bold in their denunciation of sin, they understood the principle that Joseph Smith would later teach: "Nothing is so much calculated to lead people to forsake sin as to take them by the hand, and watch over them with tenderness. When persons manifest the least kindness and love to me, O what power it has over my mind."¹³

"Come unto Christ"

7. Authors extend direct invitations, again and again choosing to not let the readers rest comfortably, but

instead confronting them with the need to either accept or reject the invitation to “come unto Christ.”

Throughout their record, Book of Mormon prophets do not allow the work to sit as a mere intellectual curiosity for the reader. They constantly challenge the reader to take notice of their message. The miraculous nature of the Book of Mormon prompts the readers to make a choice to accept that the book’s message of Christ is true. The writers recognized that many would reject that message because of future barriers to faith and disbelief in miracles, but they reached out from beyond the grave, calling to their readers not simply to believe in Christ, but to act on their faith in Christ. This chapter will conclude with a few of their persuasive calls, provided in the words of the ancient Book of Mormon witnesses:

Nephi: “Hearken unto these words and believe in Christ” (2 Nephi 33:10).

Amaleki: “Come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved” (Omni 1:26).

Alma: “Behold, I say unto you, that the good shepherd doth call you; yea, and in his own name he doth call you, which is the name of Christ. . . . Come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life” (Alma 5:38, 62).

Mormon: “Hear the words of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God” (3 Nephi 30:1).

Moroni: “I would commend you to seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written” (Ether 12:41). “Again I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ. . . . Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him” (Moroni 10:30, 32).

Jesus Christ: “Arise, and come . . . unto me” (3 Nephi 11:14).

Page after page, the Book of Mormon carefully and persistently, even relentlessly, works toward the goal that is finally expressed by Moroni’s title page, showing that it was written “to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST.”¹⁴

Notes

1. Moroni has typically been understood as the author of the title page, since he was the Book of Mormon prophet who “sealed up” (title page) the book for future generations. His words, however, closely follow Mormon’s statement directed to the book’s latter-day readers, found in 3 Nephi 29 (to the Jews) and 3 Nephi 30 (to the Gentiles). See Daniel H. Ludlow, “Book of Mormon, title page of,” in Dennis L. Largey, ed., *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 155–56.
2. This paper is not the first to propose the centrality of this message. See, among many others: Jo Ann H. Seely, “Book of Mormon, Purposes of: To the Convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, 141–42; Daniel L. Ludlow, “Book of Mormon, Selected Themes of: Come unto Christ,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, 147–49; Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997); John W. Welch, “Jesus Christ in the Scriptures: Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 748–50; Stephen Scharffs, “Unique Insights on Christ from the Book of Mormon,” in *Ensign*, December 1988, 8–13; Susan Easton Black, *Finding Christ Through the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987); Ezra Taft Benson, “The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, November 1986, 4–7; B. H. Roberts, “Christ in the Book of Mormon,” *Improvement Era*, January 1924, 188–92.
3. “You should know also that by recent decision of the Brethren the Book of Mormon will henceforth bear the title ‘The Book of Mormon,’ with the subtitle ‘Another Testament of Jesus Christ.’” Boyd K. Packer, “Scriptures,” *Ensign*, November 1982, 53.
4. The small plates appear to have shaped the remainder of Mormon’s work. Mormon explained what it was about the small plates that drew him to their message: “The things which are upon these plates pleasing me, *because of the prophecies of the coming of Christ*; . . . wherefore, I chose these things” (Words of Mormon 1:4–5, emphasis added). Mormon’s first indication of his overarching purposes is found in this section, and is stated almost as clearly as Nephi’s had been: “My [Mormon’s] prayer to God is concerning my brethren [the latter-day Lamanite descendants], that they may once again come to the knowledge of God, yea, the redemption of Christ” (verse 8). For an in-depth study of the difficult bridges in Words of Mormon, and what they might have meant for the original organization of the text on the plates, see Jack M. Lyon and Kent R. Minson, “When Pages Collide: Dissecting the Words of Mormon,” in *BYU Studies* 51, no. 4 (2012): 120–36.
5. Benson, “Keystone of Our Religion.”
6. Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 11–13.
7. John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991).

8. Burton L. Mack, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q & Christian Origins* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).
9. Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).
10. This nonbiblical saying actually appears to be a type of stock phrase among the Nephites to indicate the editing challenges they faced. It is stated three different times by Mormon (see also Helaman 3:14, 3 Nephi 5:8, and 3 Nephi 26:6) and is repeated by both Jacob (see Jacob 3:13) and by Moroni (see Ether 15:33).
11. In 2 Nephi 10:3, Nephi had already provided the name of Christ, as it had been told to his brother Jacob by an angel. From that point until the end of his writings, Nephi primarily uses the title *Christ*, employing the name fifty-three times in total (compared to *Messiah*, which he only used nine times after 2 Nephi 10).
12. Nephi’s discourse also focuses on a subset of the Jews, “my children [descendants of the Nephites], and my beloved brethren [descendants of the Lamanites]” (2 Nephi 26:1; see also 2 Nephi 30:1), showing how their future will intertwine closely with the future of the Gentiles. Since the title page’s purpose statement does not explicitly include this group, this footnote will simply acknowledge that the Book of Mormon prophets after Nephi followed his model, including the Lamanites, along with the Jews, as a group who would need to come to believe in Christ, and showing how their future would be enmeshed with the future of the Gentiles (see, in particular, Mormon 7; Moroni 10).
13. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols., ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 5:23–24.
14. The author would like to warmly acknowledge his gratitude to Dennis Largey for his help in conceiving and framing this article.

