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**Title** Notes and Communications: “Thus Saith the Lord”:  
Prophetic Language in Samuel’s Speech

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**Abstract** The prophetic language in the writings of Samuel the Lamanite includes the messenger formula, proclamation formula, oath formula, woe oracle, announcement formula, and revelations formula.

## NOTES AND COMMUNICATIONS

### “Thus Saith the Lord”: Prophetic Language in Samuel’s Speech

Donald W. Parry

Ancient scriptures contain a number of revelatory speech forms or formulaic expressions which are unique to the prophetic writings.<sup>1</sup> That is to say, the prophetic speech forms are present in sections of scripture where God reveals his word directly to the prophets (i.e., Isaiah, Amos, Nephi, Joseph Smith). As might be expected, the same prophetic forms are also present in the Book of Mormon, for it, too, consists of prophetic writings.

To demonstrate the usage of prophetic language in the Book of Mormon, we will take a brief look at the prophetic writings of Samuel the Lamanite (Helaman 13–15). Six speech forms will be identified:

1. Messenger Formula—“Thus saith the Lord” (found thirty-nine times in the Book of Mormon, e.g., 1 Nephi 20:17; Mosiah 3:24; Alma 8:17). Samuel twice used the expression, “therefore, thus saith the Lord” (Helaman 13:8, 11). The formula introduces oracular language, and hence is often found at the beginning of a pericope or section. Either God or a prophet is the speaker of the messenger formula. Its purpose is to indicate the origin and authority of the revelation.<sup>2</sup>

2. Proclamation Formula—“Listen to the words of Christ” (Moroni 8:8) or “Hearken to the word of the Lord” (Jacob 2:27; Helaman 12:23) or “Hear the words of Jesus” (3

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<sup>1</sup> For a complete study on the subject, see David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 88–100.

<sup>2</sup> Modern prophets have commented concerning the import of this expression (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake: Deseret, 1979), 136, *Journal of Discourses*, 23:370–72; *Journal of Discourses*, 22:291–92; *Discourses of Brigham Young*, (Salt Lake: Deseret, 1971), 38, 330.

Nephi 30:1). Samuel told his audience to “hearken unto the words which the Lord saith” (Helaman 13:21). Similar to the messenger formula, the proclamation formula is often found at the beginning of a revelation or announcement. It is used as an emphatic summons to hear the word of the Lord.

3. Oath Formula—“As the Lord liveth” (1 Nephi 3:15, 4:32; 2 Nephi 9:16; 25:20). The declaration is added to a testimony to accentuate the words of the speaker. For instance, Samuel stated, “as surely as the Lord liveth shall these things be, saith the Lord” (Helaman 15:17; cf. Helaman 13:26).

4. Woe Oracle—An accusation form usually found as part of a judgment speech. Some forty examples of the woe oracle are attested in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 1:13; 2 Nephi 9:27; 2 Nephi 15:21). The characteristic woe oracle consists of the accusation, the addressee, the intent of the accusation, and the promise of judgment. The prophet Samuel uttered a number of woe oracles against the Nephites (Helaman 13:11–12, 14–17, 24; 15:2–3). Helaman 13:16–17, for example, contains the following elements:

**Accusation:** Yea, and wo

**Addressee:** be unto all the cities which are in the land round about

**Intent:** because of wickedness and abominations which are in them.

**Promise of Judgment:** And behold, a curse shall come upon the land, saith the Lord of Hosts

5. Announcement Formula—“I say unto you.” The revelation formula is well attested in the Book of Mormon. The Lord speaks to his audience (an individual or group) in the first person (3 Nephi 12:22; 20:15), or a prophet speaks to his audience using the formula, adding authority and emphasis to the revelation. The formula is found at the beginning of a clause, often accompanied with the particles “yea,” “behold,” or “therefore.” Samuel employs the formula three times (Helaman 15:6, 12, 14).

6. Revelation Formula—“The word of the Lord came to me, saying” (Jacob 2:11; Alma 43:24; Ether 13:20). At the beginning of Samuel’s ministry to the Nephites, “behold, the voice of the Lord came unto him” (Helaman 13:3). Samuel told the Nephites that they would cry unto the Lord, “O that we had

repented in the day that the word of the Lord came unto us" (Helaman 13:36).

Six prophetic speech forms present in Samuel's speech—the messenger formula, the proclamation formula, the oath formula, the woe oracle, the announcement formula, and the revelation formula—are indicative of prophetic authority and prerogative. These speech forms and others dealing with the commission and divine workings of a prophet are also present in other sections of the Book of Mormon. It is hoped that this brief report will give birth to additional and in-depth studies on the topic of prophetic language in the Book of Mormon.

It has long been contended by critics of the Book of Mormon that its "Gaditanian toppers" are merely nineteenth-century Freemasons, transparently disguised.<sup>1</sup> As one of their chief arguments for that notion, such writers as David Pentecost and Robert Hullinger have pointed out that the Book of Mormon refers to the Gaditanian toppers using the same phrase, "secret combination," with which contemporary newspapers referred to the Masons during the great anti-Masonic agitation of the late 1830s.<sup>2</sup>

One can easily demonstrate, though, that the word "combination" was commonly used, in the nineteenth century and earlier, in the sense of "conspiracy." Thus, its use for the toppers of Gaditanion seems to bear little real significance for the question of Book of Mormon authorship, proving at best that the text's English vocabulary is most likely that of a nineteenth-century American. But this was never in doubt.<sup>3</sup>

However, in a 1989 article, Dan Vogel took the argument even further. "At the time of the Book of Mormon's publication," he claimed, "the term 'secret combinations' was used almost exclusively to refer to Freemasonry."<sup>4</sup> According to this

<sup>1</sup> For a survey and preliminary evaluation of the arguments advanced for this position, see Daniel C. Peterson, "Notes on 'Gaditanian Masonry,'" in Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, eds., *Wayfarer in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1990), 174-224.

<sup>2</sup> Robert H. Hullinger, *Mormon Answer to Specimens: Why Joseph Smith Wrote the Book of Mormon* (St. Louis: Clayton, 1980), 144, n. 30 and 31.

<sup>3</sup> See Peterson, "Notes on 'Gaditanian Masonry,'" 189-90.

<sup>4</sup> Dan Vogel, "Mormonism's 'Anti-Masonic Bible,'" *Utah Winter Historical Association Journal* 9 (1989): 18.