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The "Perfect Pattern": The Book of Mormon as a Model for the Writing of Sacred History

Eric C. Olson

In his article "How Should Our Story Be Told?" Robert L. Millet argued that Latter-day Saint history as a "sacred saga" should be presented in a manner that expressly bears witness of God's hand and does not dilute that witness by emphasizing mortal weaknesses.¹ While Millet's principal support for this proposition consisted of various quotes from modern Church leaders, he did cite the Book of Mormon prophets Nephi and Jacob to the effect that their records included those things "most precious" to them — "the things that are pleasing unto God" (1 Ne. 6:5; Jacob 1:3). Without offering either support or explanation, Millet declared, "It may well be that *the perfect pattern* for the writing of our story — a sacred history — is contained in the Book of Mormon."²

As a believer in the Book of Mormon, I was attracted by this assertion. Like so many statements born of deep belief and devotion, it sounds so good that it must be true. Yet, on examination, the assertion is more easily made than explained, defended, or applied. The purpose of this article is to consider what pattern for historical writing, if any, the Book of Mormon contains and whether it is a "perfect pattern" for recording the history of the Restoration.³

THE SMALL PLATES

A "pattern of history" in the Book of Mormon is not immediately discernable. The book is a patchwork of sources including not only Nephite records, but also the brass plates of Laban and the gold plates of Ether. The principal and best-known Book of Mormon sources are the large and small plates of Nephi. It is to the small plates that Millet turns for the two Book of Mormon

Eric C. Olsen practices with the Salt Lake City law firm of Van Cott, Bagley, Cornwall and McCarthy.

quotations in support of his thesis. However, careful consideration of the small plates — particularly what their authors said about the plates' purposes, limitations, and contents — establishes that they were not intended as either a pattern or a prescription for the writing of sacred history.

Nephi, the principal author of the small plates, repeatedly emphasized that he was *not* writing a history in the small plates; that function was reserved for the large plates. This distinction is part of nearly every Book of Mormon discussion of Nephi's records:

It mattereth not to me that I am particular to give *a full account* of all the things of my father, for they cannot be written upon these [small] plates, for I desire the room that I may write the things of God. (1 Ne. 6:3; italics added)

As I have spoken concerning these [small] plates, behold they are *not* the plates upon which I make a full account of the history of my people. (1 Ne. 9:2, 4; italics added)

These [small] plates are for the more part of the ministry. (1 Ne. 9:4)

After I had made these [small] plates by way of commandment, I, Nephi, received a commandment that the ministry and the prophecies, the more plain and precious parts of them, should be written upon these plates; and that the things which were written should be kept for the instruction of my people. (1 Ne. 19:3)

For I, Nephi, was constrained to speak unto them [Laman and Lemuel], according to [the Lord's] word; for I had spoken many things unto them, and also my father, before his death; many of which sayings are written upon mine other plates; *for a more history part are written upon mine other plates*. And upon these [small plates] I write the things of my soul. (2 Ne. 4:14–15; italics added)

Nephi gave me, Jacob, a commandment concerning the small plates, upon which these things are engraven . . . that I should write upon these plates a few of the things which I considered to be most precious; that I should not touch, save it were lightly, concerning the history of this people. . . . *For he said that the history of his people should be engraven upon his other plates. . . .* [I]f there were preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying, that I should engraven the heads of them upon these [small] plates. (Jacob 1:1–4; italics added.)

Those like Millet who cite the small plates for directives on how to write sacred history must do so in the face of Nephi's repeated disclaimer that his small plates are not a history.

In reality, the small plates are a combination journal and sacred scrapbook. In these plates, Nephi recorded his visions, teachings and prophecies;⁴ his favorite scriptures from the brass plates;⁵ the teachings of his father and brother;⁶ and items of history incident to his personal spiritual development.⁷ In these plates,

Nephi expressed unerring loyalty to the Lord on whose grace and goodness he, in his feeble mortal state, had to rely: "And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted. My God hath been my support" (2 Ne. 4:19–20). "O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of the flesh. . . . Yea, cursed is he that putteth his trust in man" (2 Ne. 4:34).

In contrast, the tone of Nephi's writing and his choice of content are evidence that he entertained no strong loyalty to any mortal (i.e., the "flesh"), whether mother, brother, priest, or prophet. As a consequence, Nephi frankly acknowledged human weakness wherever he observed them. He turned his critical eye first on the Jews and their elders, including Laban, and then on his brothers Laman and Lemuel. He noted, "The Jews did mock [Lehi] because of the things which he testified of them; for he truly testified of their wickedness and their abominations" (1 Ne. 1:19). Nephi recorded Laban's murderous and deceptive treatment of Lehi's sons and ironically noted Laban's drunken return from a night among the "elders of the Jews" (1 Ne. 3:13, 4:7, 4:22). Of Laman and Lemuel, Nephi observed almost at the outset: "They did murmur in many things against their father, because he was a visionary man . . . [following] the foolish imaginations of his heart" (1 Ne. 2:11).

Nephi was similarly frank about the weaknesses of those whom we might think he would avoid "criticizing." In language echoing his earlier observations concerning Laman and Lemuel, Nephi recorded his mother Sariah's words to Lehi when her sons failed to return promptly from their first errand to Jerusalem: "She . . . complained against my father, telling him that he was a *visionary man*" (1 Ne. 5:2; italics added). When Ishmael died, Nephi recorded that Ishmael's daughters, including presumably Nephi's own wife, "did murmur against [Lehi], and also against [Nephi]; and they were desirous to return again to Jerusalem" (1 Ne. 16:36). Finally, Nephi noted that his father, the prophet Lehi, "began to murmur against the Lord his God" when Nephi broke his "fine steel bow" (1 Ne. 16:18, 20). Thereafter, Lehi "was truly chastened because of his murmuring against the Lord, insomuch that he was brought down in the depths of sorrow" (1 Ne. 16:25).

Nephi did not limit his candor to his account of the deeds of others or of those who were his contemporaries. He acknowledged his own mortal limitations: "O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me" (2 Ne. 4:17–18). Further, as if anticipating the modern bent towards propaganda

and advocacy that at times threatens to run roughshod over the simple human truth, Nephi warned that in our day “others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well — and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell” (2 Ne. 28:21). In his final benediction, Nephi acknowledged the standard by which he kept his small plates: “I glory in *plainness*; I glory in *truth*; I glory in my *Jesus*, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell” (2 Ne. 33:6; italics added).

In summary, to the extent that the compilers of the small plates “touch[ed] lightly” upon Nephite history, whether upon their own condition or upon that of future generations, they spoke frankly of human weakness. And Mormon, acting under God’s direction, included this record, warts and all, intact and without editing (W of M 1:7). The small plates are not (and do not purport to be) a pattern of history, but as a reflection of the values and priorities of their compilers and editor, they evidence the willingness of prophet scribes to recognize mortal limitations and failings.⁸

THE LARGE PLATES

Unlike the small plates, the large plates do not appear intact in our Book of Mormon; rather, we have Mormon’s abridgement of the large plates. The focus of these plates is often contrasted with that of the small plates. For instance, the headnotes and indexes in the 1920 and 1981 editions of the Book of Mormon refer to the small plates as “spiritual history” and the large plates as “secular history.”⁹ Yet, the text of the Book of Mormon no more supports the notion that the large plates are “secular” than, as has been seen, it supports the assertion that the small plates are “history.”

The large plates, kept by prophets at the command of God, were also considered sacred (1 Ne. 19:3; Alma 37:2). Nephi noted early on: “I do not write anything upon plates save it be that I think it be sacred” (1 Ne. 15:6). And Mormon described at the end of Nephite history “the records which had been handed down by our fathers, which were sacred” (Morm. 6:6). Excluding perhaps the brief time when Nephi and Jacob actively kept both sets of plates, the small plates were never maintained as history in competition with the large plates. Therefore, if there is any validity to the sacred/secular dichotomy for the small plates and large plates suggested in the last two editions of the Book of Mormon, it would have to be on the basis of subject matter and not perspective.

Mormon’s abridgement does allow us to consider whatever pattern of history the Book of Mormon may contain because, unlike

Nephi, Mormon was a historian. He took the accumulated Nephite records covering almost one thousand years and fashioned a narrative — a portion of which makes up 65 percent of our present Book of Mormon.¹⁰ In the abridgement we can read Mormon's commentary and see his editorial choices. These in turn disclose whatever "pattern" there may be to his history.

Because we do not have Mormon's complete abridgment, any generalization about a pattern in the entire narrative is tentative at best. We cannot be certain how much or what Mormon wrote about the first 476 years of Nephite history or how the lost portion of his history compares with the extant portion. (For instance, it is likely that, if the first 116 pages of the translation of Mormon's abridgment were to replace the translation of the small plates, the overall Book of Mormon would be considerably shorter, but the first half of Nephite history would be more detailed.)

With this caveat in mind, however, a few things can be observed about the pattern of Mormon's history. First, as to general content, it is no more a pure history than the small plates are purely sacred instruction. Just as the small plates are 25 percent history, the large plates' narrative is 35 percent instruction. Mormon inserted extensive quotations such as King Benjamin's address; Abinadi's preaching; Alma's sermons, preaching, and fatherly advice; Samuel's prophecies; and Jesus' words to the Nephites.¹¹ While some of these quotations bear on the historical narrative, the primary purpose for their inclusion, as is that of the major portion of the small plates, appears to be instructional.¹² Thus, Mormon intended his record to be more than a recitation of events or a witness of calamities. He also intended it to teach spiritual truths.

A second aspect of Mormon's narrative is his consistent recognition of God's hand in the mortal affairs he chronicled. Only infrequently did he note God's overt intervention in history. More commonly, Mormon noted divine influence through witnesses who were influenced by divine power, the cyclical nature of events, and the operation of opposing spiritual forces.

For example, in the entire account of Zeniff's people (Mosiah 9–24), the only overtly miraculous sign of God's involvement is the deep sleep that came upon the Lamanites and thus allowed the people of Alma to escape from the Land of Helam. In his commentary on the Zeniffite history, Mormon described this specific incident as the "immediate goodness of God" (Mosiah 25:10). Yet although the remainder of the Zeniff narrative does not dwell on God's "immediate goodness," the narrative is still a recognition of divine influence. The text describes how the human pride and ambition exemplified by Zeniff degenerated over one

generation into the materialism, profanity, and licentiousness of Noah. Once in a condition of spiritual infirmity, the Zeniffite society rejected Abinadi and acquiesced in the murder of the only person with the spiritual sanity to speak openly of the eternal consequences of the society's warped values. Abinadi's accusing words and Alma's subsequent efforts to pursue Abinadi's directives were deemed subversive by the authorities and were vigorously suppressed. War and misery ensued with the people eventually realizing by experience the decadence of their ways (what the majority would not recognize by faith on Abinadi's words). In the end, "delivered out of bondage," they were reminded that "it was the Lord that did deliver them" (Mosiah 25:16). In this narrative, God's influence is seen not in a collection of overtly miraculous or indisputably divine events, but in a string of individually mundane occurrences which cumulatively witness divine involvement in mortal affairs.

Coming as it does near the commencement of our version of Mormon's narrative, this account is a suitable example of how Mormon saw history as a witness of divine influence in mortal affairs. Mormon recognized that seeing God's influence in history is less a function of what one sees than how one sees it. To most of the people of Noah, Abinadi was a long winded-critic and a pest, not a prophet. Later figures such as the sons of Mosiah and Samuel were unwanted foreign missionaries to most of those to whom they directed their message.¹³ Those who heard Nephi's lament as he spoke from the garden tower were divided in their opinion of him notwithstanding his remarkable prediction of the chief judge's murder.¹⁴ Even the marvelous night without darkness at the Savior's birth did not convert all who witnessed it, nor did it result in the permanent conversion of those who joined the Church in its aftermath.¹⁵ Mormon's abridgement bears witness of a God whose hand in human affairs is light and, judged on purely empirical or humanistic bases, by no means temporally indisputable. Yet the narrative challenges all to develop the spiritual perspective necessary to discern God's influence.

The most compelling evidence of God's influence in Mormon's narrative is the cyclical nature of Nephite history. If there is a pattern in the Book of Mormon, this is it. The cycle runs something like this: God blesses mortals; they prosper; in their prosperity they think themselves independent and self-sufficient; they forget the source of their blessings; they become proud; they justify themselves in violating God's laws; they pursue power and wealth as ends in themselves; this misdirected pursuit results in destructive contention (since not all can be powerful and wealthy at

the same time); their contention produces misfortune and the loss of goods and power — the things they value most; without power and wealth, they realize their true spiritual condition (a reflection of their temporal condition) and the necessity of relying on God; and this recognition enables a gracious God to forgive and to bless them. This cycle is repeated numerous times in Mormon's narrative. It is his central concern, perhaps because he lives at the fatal end of the last such cycle. In his longest and most pointed commentary on the story that he tells, Mormon summarizes the lesson of this cycle:

And thus we can behold how false, and also the unsteadiness of the hearts of the children of men; yea, we can see that the Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him. Yea, and we may see at the very time when he doth prosper his people, . . . doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people; yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God . . . because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity. And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people . . . they will not remember him. (Hel. 12:1–3)

This view of God's hand in mortal affairs revealed by a sacred historical cycle turns as much on a candid acknowledgement of mortal weakness as on the recognition of divine influence. An infinite atonement is a compelling practical and spiritual truth only if humankind is in a fallen state. Thus Mormon, like Nephi, was free and unapologetic in noting the weaknesses of not just the "bad guys," but of all men, as in the following examples:

1. Zeniff is described as "overzealous," "deceived," and "slow to remember the Lord" (Mosiah 7:21; 9:3).
2. Before his conversion, Alma the Elder is identified as one of Noah's wicked priests (Mosiah 17:2).
3. Ammon declined to baptize king Limhi and others, "considering himself an unworthy servant" (Mosiah 21:33).
4. Alma the Younger, the pivotal Nephite prophet, and Mosiah's sons "were the very vilest of sinners" (Mosiah 28:4), and their acts of rebellion and persecution are mentioned not once, but twice in the narrative (Mosiah 27; Alma 37).
5. Corianton's sexual sin on his mission to the Zoramites is mentioned specifically (Alma 39:3).

A particularly interesting test of Mormon's candor is the case of Captain Moroni's correspondence with Chief Judge Pahoran. Mormon clearly held Moroni in great esteem. He named his son after Captain Moroni, he devoted sixty-five pages of narrative to Moroni's military exploits, and he gave Moroni an unqualified editorial endorsement: "He was a man of a perfect understanding"

(Alma 48:11). “If all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever” (Alma 48:11, 17).

But in the records from which he made his abridgement, Mormon found an angry, accusatory letter from Captain Moroni to Chief Judge Pahoran and Pahoran’s reply thereto. Both letters were written in the midst of the Amalickiahite wars. Moroni wrote first “by the way of condemnation,” accusing Pahoran of being in a “thoughtless state” and of “exceedingly great neglect” for failing to provide material support for Moroni’s army: “Can you think to sit upon your thrones in a state of thoughtless stupor, while your enemies are spreading the work of death around you?” (Alma 60:2, 6–7). Moroni then accused Pahoran of withholding provisions and intimated that Pahoran might well be a “traitor” to the Nephite cause (Alma 60:9, 18). Moroni concluded:

Ye know that ye do transgress the laws of God, and ye do know that ye do trample them under your feet. Behold, *the Lord saith unto me*: If those whom ye have appointed your governors do not repent of their sins and iniquities, ye shall go up to battle against them. (Alma 60:33; italics added)

At the end of a long and bloody campaign with his troops short on supplies, Moroni’s anger is understandable. But he attributed to the Lord an unqualified assessment of Pahoran’s iniquity. As we learn from Pahoran’s reply, however, the threat was misdirected, and Moroni’s accusations were simply wrong (Alma 61). Pahoran was loyal and not in transgression. The lack of attention that so angered Moroni was the result of third-party intrigue and rebellion. In the end, Moroni and Pahoran united to remedy the situation.

From our perspective, as we try to determine what the Book of Mormon tells us about writing sacred history, the question arises, Why did Mormon include the verbatim correspondence or even allude to it? It is not essential to his narrative. Moroni’s accusations were factually wrong. His impatience with the lack of support from the government led him to accuse Pahoran unjustly and to attribute his own anger to the voice of the Lord. Such a letter, written by an esteemed figure that so misses the mark, might in our day end up in some vault. At the least, it would be edited or summarized to lessen its impact. And it certainly would not be juxtaposed with a letter showing the true facts and underscoring Captain Moroni’s errors. Yet Mormon offered no apology or explanation for the letters. In the Book of Mormon historical view, none is needed. Mormon the historian and prophet could admire and hold up as an example a man who had undeniable weaknesses of the flesh.

A final characteristic of Mormon's history is his perspective. He wrote at the end of his people's thousand-year history to an audience at least fourteen hundred years in the future. For the definitive telling of a sacred story, this timing is ideal. One knows how the story ends and, with prophetic insight, one knows what part of the written record is relevant both to that ending and to the future audience. This dual perspective may explain why certain themes are emphasized and certain records were included, why the previously mentioned spiritual cycle was made so apparent, and why Mormon told his story with such confidence. Certainly, at a minimum, Mormon's perspective gave him a decided advantage over the modern historian who must record and interpret without knowing precisely either the final outcome or the needs of the reader.

MORONI'S ABRIDGEMENT

Moroni's historical work deals almost exclusively with the Jaredites. As with his father's abridgement, Moroni mixed history and admonition, pointed to divine influence in mortal affairs, underscored the blessing/misery cycle, exposed human weakness even in the highly regarded, and wrote with enhanced perspective.¹⁶ This continuity with the work of his father is not surprising, but it is important to note that both father and son have much in common with the authors of the small plates as well. Though Nephi and his direct descendants did not expressly set forth the blessing/misery cycle, they emphasized the Lord's influence in their affairs, and they dealt squarely with issues of human weakness.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper began as an inquiry into Millet's assertion that the Book of Mormon may well be a "perfect pattern" for writing sacred history. From the discussion above, it is clear that the Book of Mormon is not the pattern that Millet seemed to think it is or would like it to be. The small plates, from which Millet purported to draw his pattern, are not history at all. While Millet argued for advocacy in the presentation of sacred history, including not emphasizing the weaknesses of ecclesiastical leaders, the Book of Mormon authors candidly recognized the good and less-than-good in the lives of all no matter who they were or what positions they held. Where Millet advocated historical writing that reflects through its positive tone a loyalty to God's church, the Book of Mormon prophets criticized both the contemporary church and the church of the future. Their sole unerring loyalty in writing history was to God, the only being worthy of such uncritical loyalty.

To argue that the Book of Mormon is the “perfect pattern” for writing sacred history in the modern day, however, would not fairly account for the serious differences between the circumstances of the Book of Mormon record keepers and the circumstances of modern Latter-day Saint historians. For instance, the consequences of a freewheeling discussion of human weakness are different where the subject has been dead for two millennia rather than for only a few years or decades, especially when an author is surrounded by the person’s worshipful descendants. Similarly, delineation of spiritual cycles is necessarily more tentative when an author is in the midst of the cycle rather than at the end of the story. It probably would not do in this day and time to record: “And in the commencement of the ninth year of the tenure of the prophet Spencer W. Kimball, the people of the Church began to wax proud in their costly apparel and luxurious abodes and to disregard the words of the prophet.” In fact, the modern day, with instantaneous mass communication, with media often prone to oversimplification and sensationalism, and with a general populace often lacking the perspective that comes from a sound understanding of the past, is arguably not the time to practice the candor or the criticism of a Nephi or Mormon.

Nonetheless, by inference, one can discern a pattern in the Book of Mormon that provides some useful instruction for the writing of sacred history in our day. Some aspects of that pattern include the following:

1. *Types of History.* Because the Book of Mormon is a composite of records written for diverse purposes, its example cautions us to withhold judgment on those who may approach the history of the Restoration in a manner different from that which we would choose. In the Book of Mormon, one sees an account of the early Nephite “ministry” (small plates), an account of later Nephite “proceedings” (large plates), and an analysis of the Nephite downfall (Mormon’s abridgement). Not one of these records or approaches purports to be absolutely superior to all others or to be the right or only way to consider Nephite history. In fact, there is no sense of competition between authors or methodologies. Today, we might appropriately spend more time finding sacred meaning in so-called secular accounts (as Mormon did) than criticizing those accounts.

2. *God’s Hand.* Historians can appropriately undertake to discern God’s influence in mortal affairs. However, the Book of Mormon reminds us that God’s hand is seen most clearly and is identified with greatest confidence at the end of an era. Often we need a bit of distance to distinguish fully between the “wheat” and the “tares,” the “pearls” and the “swine.” Further, God’s direct participation in history — the overtly miraculous or “immediate

goodness" — is the exception. Divine influence is more commonly to be found in our principled and insightful interpretation of outwardly mundane events. However, if that influence is to be discovered (and not simply manufactured), it is up to the observer (the historian) to recognize the influence and to describe it fairly and accurately.

3. *Accuracy.* For the sacred story to be told adequately, not only the perspective, but also the details must be accurate. If we shade the facts or delete or embellish, we misrepresent God's influence. Such "adjustments" are to be expected where the writer is acting as an advocate for an institution, such as a church or a university, which is run by humans. But when we are advocating God, as true sacred history must, we are constrained to be honest about mortal failings so that God's grace and goodness is seen as independent of human limitations. Nephi stated clearly that in the latter days those inclined to proclaim uncritically "all is well in Zion" (2 Ne. 28:21) are not disseminating spiritually accurate information.

4. *Instruction.* The Book of Mormon emphasizes that sacred history is to have a central, instructional purpose. Picking through the good and not-so-good of the past is not solely an academic exercise; study of the past should teach us how to understand and live in the present. Writers of sacred history must do more than simply report events; they must articulate the sacred meaning of those events. The Book of Mormon consistently reminds the reader that mortal events have sacred meaning and eternal consequences.

Nowhere does the Book of Mormon suggest that it was written to be a pattern of historical writing. The limited lessons set forth above are generally incidental to the sacred text. Yet, they point to a measure of moderation coupled with tolerance and insight that too often is absent in modern efforts at sacred history. We would be wise, in approaching the daunting challenge of setting down the past with spiritual accuracy, to "behold our weakness" (Ether 12:25) and then to write with integrity to ourselves and to God. By thus proceeding, we will indeed be following the "perfect pattern" of the Book of Mormon.

NOTES

¹ Robert L. Millet, ed., *To Be Learned Is Good If . . .* (Bookcraft: Salt Lake City, 1987).

² Millet, 2; italics added.

³ For purposes of this discussion, I have adopted Millet's apparent definition of history as a "recitation of . . . events," "an account of those things which have brought [about] the . . . present" (Millet, 2).

⁴ 1 Ne. 11–15, 23; and 2 Ne. 25–33.

⁵ 1 Ne. 19–21; and 2 Ne. 12–24.

⁶ 1 Ne. 5, 8, 10; and 2 Ne. 1–4, 6–11.

⁷ 1 Ne. 1–5, 8, 16–18; and 2 Ne. 5.

⁸ Later contributors to the small plates — Jacob, Enos, and Omni — followed Nephi’s lead in speaking plainly of their own weaknesses. Omni freely acknowledged that he was a “wicked man” (Omni 1:2). Enos implied a disregard for spiritual things prior to his “wrestle . . . before God” (Enos 1:1–4). Most poignant of all is Jacob, who wrote of his “anxiety” and “grief” before God as a prophet and teacher to his people (Jacob 1:5, 2:6–7). His trust was in God’s grace and the redeeming change that it could work in willing mortals: “We labored diligently among our people, that we might persuade them to come unto Christ and partake of the goodness of God, that they might enter into his rest” (Jacob 1:7).

⁹ Book of Mormon (1926), 561; Book of Mormon (1981), 162, and Index, 266–67.

¹⁰ The first part of Mormon’s abridgement was lost as a result of Martin Harris’s mishandling of the first 116 manuscript pages.

¹¹ Mosiah 2–5, 12–15; Alma 5–7, 9–13, 29, 32–33, 36–42; Helaman 13–15; and 3 Nephi 11–27.

¹² This analysis applies even to Samuel’s prophecy, which is the most closely tied to the historical narrative. The various signs enumerated by Samuel are included as witnesses of Christ’s literal coming in the flesh and of the Nephites’ appalling lack of preparation for that event.

¹³ Alma 21:13; and Helaman 16:2.

¹⁴ Helaman 9:39–41, 10:1.

¹⁵ 3 Nephi 1:22.

¹⁶ For respective examples, see Mormon 8; Moroni 10:24–25; Ether 7, 2:14, 12:23–25; and Mormon 8:25.