

# "To Come Forth in Due Time" - Introduction

My love of great literature and my testimony of the saving principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ converge in seeing the Book of Mormon as sacred literature. To take a literary approach enhanced by spiritual sensitivity is to engage our full capacities in understanding and feeling. It is to delight in the way something is said in a way to reveal its essence. This approach is appropriate and helpful in respect to the Book of Mormon. In this work of literature, God-directed prophets speak to us in the most powerful and effective ways possible by interconnecting truth, goodness, and beauty.

By literature I mean belles lettres in its literal sense, “beautiful letters”. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, literature is “the record of the best thoughts.”<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth called poetic literature “the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge.”<sup>2</sup> Poetry, Robert Frost wrote, is saying “matter in terms of spirit and spirit in terms of matter,” or “saying one thing in terms of another.”<sup>3</sup> Orson F. Whitney considered the essence of poetry to be “in thought, sentiment, and the power of suggestion. It is the music of ideas, as well as the music of language.” It is, he said, “the power by which we appreciate and sympathize with all that is good, pure, true, beautiful and sublime.”<sup>4</sup> Literature engages all our senses; it involves not only thinking but also feeling. Through literature we imaginatively touch, taste, hear, and see.

Many parts of the Book of Mormon have a literary appeal. They bid us to taste and hear, to experience spirit in terms of matter. In the book we are often put in the situation of the Nephites visited by the resurrected Savior: they “did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands” (3 Nephi 11:15). We are encouraged to “receive the pleasing word of God, and feast upon his love” (Jacob 3:2).

As an example of “feasting upon the pleasing word of God” (Jacob 2:9), Jacob poetically adapts Isaiah to encourage us to

Hearken diligently unto me, and remember the words which I have spoken; and come unto the Holy One of Israel, and feast upon that which perisheth not, neither can be corrupted, and let your soul delight in fatness. (2 Nephi 9:51; cf. Isaiah 55:2)<sup>5</sup>

This poignant appeal and other poetic segments like it are woven into the fabric of the Book of Mormon. These materials were selected and designed by inspired persons “to come forth in due time,” as Moroni puts it in the title page, for people living in a later age. When I say “designed,” I mean not only planned with a purpose but shaped artistically so that form and content are totally integrated, as they are in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Handel’s *Messiah*, or Michelangelo’s paintings in the Sistine Chapel. With respect to *Paradise Lost*, for example, the majesty of Milton’s theme to “justify the ways of God to men” requires the magnitude of the epic form and the stateliness of unrhymed English heroic verse. With Handel’s *Messiah*, the exalted oratorio form carries the profound scriptural messages.

The purpose of the chapters that follow is to set forth a literary testimony of the Book of Mormon, to show how the impact of *what* the Book of Mormon says often is created through *how* it is said. The interconnection of beauty with truth and goodness invites us to Christ. That is, literary elements such as form, imagery, poetry, and narrative help teach and motivate us in ways that touch our hearts and souls as well as our minds. <sup>6</sup> We “see feelingly,” as

Gloucester puts it in another context in Shakespeare's *King Lear*; we gain what Nathaniel Hawthorne calls "heart-knowledge."<sup>7</sup>

Nephi understood the heart-knowledge that comes through pondering with our heart scriptural truths and delighting with our soul in the beautiful ways in which those truths are presented. In what has been called a psalm, Nephi says:

For my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them, and writeth them for the learning and the profit of my children. Behold, my soul delighteth in the things of the Lord; and my heart pondereth continually upon the things which I have seen and heard. (2 Nephi 4:15–16)

This engagement of heart and soul is part of the Creator's plan to appeal to all our senses. For example, he has given us fruit, such as strawberries and apples, for the "benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart; . . . for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul" (D&C 59:18–19). His works are both useful and beautiful; they have both "strength and beauty" (Psalm 96:6). Indeed, as with the strawberries, their beauty often attracts us to their use. Author of the beautiful, the Lord "hath made every thing beautiful in his time" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Zion is "the perfection of beauty" (Psalm 50:2).

This beauty extends to God's words. "How sweet are thy words unto my taste!" says the Psalmist, "yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psalm 119:103). That is the experience of Lehi and Nephi in the dream vision of the tree of life: the beauty of the tree was "far beyond, yea, exceeding of all beauty; and the whiteness thereof did exceed the whiteness of the driven snow" (1 Nephi 11:8). To partake of this beautiful fruit is a soul-filling experience: "I beheld that it was most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted. Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen. And as I partook of the fruit thereof it filled my soul with exceedingly great joy" (1 Nephi 8:11–12). Symbolically the love of God, the tree with its fruit is also the word of God, as Alma understands: "But if ye will nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree as it beginneth to grow, by your faith with great diligence, and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life" (Alma 32:41).

The Book of Mormon is itself a tree of life—a work of beauty and purity, with its words to be feasted upon. A literary approach helps reveal that beauty. In reading of another's experience, we often understand it better through comparison or a figure of speech. Thus when Alma says, "ye have tasted this light" (Alma 32:35), we come closer to sensing what it means to experience the "light of truth" (D&C 93:29). The book allows us to share the experience of Mormon, who for his part "tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus" (Mormon 1:15). For those who seek after anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report, the book combines the qualities of the good, the beautiful, and the true. Just as Zion is challenged by Isaiah to "put on [its] beautiful garments" (2 Nephi 8:24), so we might consider that the Book of Mormon has beautiful garments in the way it is presented.

Beauty in the Book of Mormon takes many forms. In Nephi's psalm, the repeated words and phrases appeal to our auditory delight in rhythm and repetition. Through imagination, the reader responds to Nephi's metaphors, his saying one thing in terms of another. "My soul will rejoice in thee," he says, "my God, and the rock of my salvation" (2 Nephi 4:30). He continues with a series of metaphors that present concrete images relating to such experiences as being delivered, shaking, having one set of gates closed and another set open, and walking in a narrow path. These make it more possible for us to identify with him:

O Lord, wilt thou redeem my soul? Wilt thou deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies? Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin? May the gates of hell be shut continually before me, because that my heart is broken and my spirit is contrite! O Lord, wilt thou not shut the gates of thy righteousness before me, that I may walk in the path of the low valley, that I may be strict in the plain road! O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness! O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies! Wilt thou make my path straight before me! Wilt thou not place a stumbling block in my way— but that thou wouldst clear my way before me, and hedge not up my way, but the ways of mine enemy. (2 Nephi 4:31–33)

The power of Nephi’s words is most apparent when the passage is read aloud and also when it is recognized as poetry with its primary appeal to feeling.<sup>8</sup> I discovered this quality through my own experience: when my family and I read the Book of Mormon together each morning, I recognized the intense nature of passages such as Nephi’s psalm. Later, when I searched the Book of Mormon for its poetry, I better understood why I was responding with my feelings to these passages. I also experienced this intensity vicariously through the response of a certain friend, who was a graduate student in public health and a Blackfoot Indian. I had wanted to see how a Native American would respond to hearing the Book of Mormon, and as I read Nephi’s psalm to my friend, I could see how he was visibly moved. Afterwards he told me he felt a stirring of emotions related to how he felt as a boy hearing chants and drum beats. Especially, he said, he could feel and identify with Nephi’s joy and sorrow.

Read aloud, Nephi’s words convey emotionally his depth of feeling. They become music that stirs the spirit more directly than would words simply read with the eyes.

Yea, I know that God will give liberally to him that asketh. Yea, my God will give me, if I ask not amiss; therefore I will lift up my voice unto thee; yea, I will cry unto thee, my God, the rock of my righteousness. Behold, my voice shall forever ascend up unto thee, my rock and mine everlasting God. (2 Nephi 4:35)

Though we have the Book of Mormon in printed form, a number of evidences suggest that much of its content was originally transmitted orally. A “voice” from the dust, the book records what various prophets heard and taught. Alma remembered word for word what Abinadi taught and then related it to his followers; likewise, the chosen disciples of the Savior remembered the sermon he gave the people at the temple and then repeated it from memory the next day. The parting testimony of Nephi is “the voice of one crying from the dust” (2 Nephi 33:13). Alma the younger asks the people if they can imagine to themselves that they “hear the voice of the Lord” speaking to them at judgment day (Alma 5:16). “The good shepherd doth call you,” he goes on to say (Alma 5:38). Many of the direct words of Christ are contained in the Book of Mormon—words we are intended to hear with our ears as well as see with our eyes. There is much merit in listening to the Book of Mormon as well as reading it.

When we read or listen to the Book of Mormon as a whole, we discover more readily those elements we might well call literary—poetry, chiasms, repetitions, word choice, imagery, and the like—and feel the character of the book. Thus, while my Book of Mormon references will be to the current edition,<sup>9</sup> occasionally I will group sentences together in the spirit of the first printed edition (1830). In that edition, the Book of Mormon is made up of many fewer chapters than are in the current edition. For example, the First Book of Nephi contains seven chapters in the 1830 edition; it has twenty-two in the 1981 edition. Paragraphs in the 1830 edition are longer, sometimes a couple of pages in length. It was not until the 1879 edition that Orson Pratt divided the Book of Mormon into our present-day chapters and verses. Although this division makes it easier to cite specific passages, the earlier arrangement better allows one to experience the narrative flow of the book.

Indeed, through a variety of means, the Lord has made the Book of Mormon as memorable as possible for us. In this richly varied work we learn the value of freedom through the compelling story of Captain Moroni and his title of liberty. We learn of the dangers of secret combinations through the chilling accounts of Kishkumen and Gadianton and then through the frightening details of the story of Akish in the book of Ether. The nature of deception is exposed in the dramatic encounters between Jacob and Sherem, Alma and Nehor, and Alma and Korihor. Further, we are shown—not simply told—how covenanted people can avoid being deceived. Rhetorical and poetic power are behind Mormon’s great sermon on faith, hope, and charity. And the destruction of the world (meaning the wicked) and the glory of Christ’s second coming are set forth figuratively in the events of Third Nephi, just as the Millennium is prefigured in the first part of Fourth Nephi.<sup>10</sup>

Made up of diverse books, the Book of Mormon as a complete whole is a single “voice”—that of Jesus Christ who inspired Mormon and others regarding what should be included in the book and how they should present it. This primary author of the Book of Mormon knew that it would come forth just before his second coming. Fulfilling specific purposes, the Book of Mormon was designed for our day.

### **Designed for Our Day**

**“The Book of Mormon . . . was written for our day,” President Ezra Taft Benson asserted. “Under the inspiration of God, who sees all things from the beginning,” he said, Mormon “abridged centuries of records, choosing the stories, speeches, and events that would be most helpful to us.”<sup>11</sup> Hugh Nibley has similarly said that “the matter in the Book of Mormon was selected, as we are often reminded, with scrupulous care and with particular readers in mind. For some reason there has been chosen for our attention a story of how and why two previous civilizations on this continent were utterly destroyed.”<sup>12</sup> Our own world at the end of the twentieth century, Nibley believes, “is the world with which the Book of Mormon is primarily concerned.”<sup>13</sup>**

In its teachings and concerns the book is clearly relevant to our own times, but it is more than that: coming out of one age, the Book of Mormon materials have been shaped and selected by inspired prophet-artists for people living in another age. The Book of Mormon is like a lovely modern home made of bricks from older structures. The bricks may have interest in themselves, but they are now a part of new buildings with new form and function. In other words, the Book of Mormon contains carefully selected and integrated “bricks” of history, sermons, letters, and prophecies, shaped specifically and intentionally into a beautiful “house” designed for the latter days. Though its doctrines are timeless and appropriate for various periods, the Book of Mormon is just coming into its own. “In its descriptions of the problems of today’s society, it is as current as the morning newspaper, and much more definitive, inspired, and inspiring concerning the solutions of those problems,” said President Gordon B. Hinckley.<sup>14</sup>

Of course Mormon and Moroni were writing for a future time. They had to be. Mormon did most of his writing during the long lull before what he knew would be an exterminating battle, and Moroni’s writings are those of the lone wanderer destined to bury his precious work in the earth. From title page to parting words, father and son make clear that what they are inspired to include is first to the latter-day Lamanites and then to latter-day Gentiles and Jews. They speak as though “from the dead” to an audience living many generations hence (Mormon 9:30). In prophetic collapsed time, Moroni speaks to this audience “as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Mormon 8:35).

Writers such as Moroni and his father are, however, actually secondary authors of the Book of Mormon; the primary author is Jesus Christ. As Mormon affirms, “I . . . do write the things which have been commanded me of the Lord” (3 Nephi 26:12). Again, the premortal Savior told Joseph of Egypt, the great patriarch, that Joseph Smith

would write “the words which are expedient in my wisdom should go forth unto the fruit of thy loins” (2 Nephi 3:19).

The Book of Mormon is a time capsule, written in ancient America but designed for a latter-day audience. Considered in its entirety, the book is neither an abridgment in the common meaning of “condensation” nor is it a history as such. Rather, it emphasizes doctrinal teachings and examples, with most of the book devoted to the 150 years before Christ’s coming. More than half the thousand-year span of Nephite history is covered in less than four pages—which would be a poor balance if the book claimed to be simply history. But it does not. It has come forth “that these things [elements listed as preparatory to the second coming of Christ] might be known among you, O inhabitants of the earth” (D&C 133:36); it heralds the fulfillment of the covenant of restoration so that “ye need not say that the Lord delays his coming unto the children of Israel” (3 Nephi 29:2); and it prepares us for the Millennium, being written so “that evil may be done away, and that the time may come that Satan may have no power upon the hearts of the children of men” (Ether 8:26).

### ***Designed for Our Day***

Not only is the Book of Mormon intended for our day but it is also shaped artistically through ancient literary forms that appeal to us today. In the Book of Mormon, as in other great works of literature, effective presentation is essential to convey purpose. This point is well made by President Boyd K. Packer. He tells how as a mission president he wanted to teach his missionaries the importance of presentation. He showed the assembled missionaries a beautifully decorated cake representing the gospel, but then he served the cake by grabbing a fistful of it and throwing it at an elder. There were no takers for a second slice until he produced a crystal dish, silver fork, linen napkin, and silver serving knife and then cut a piece carefully and put it neatly on the crystal plate before serving it. His lesson was that for the message to be received, the messenger must take care to serve it well.<sup>15</sup>

Through inspiration, those who wrote and compiled the Book of Mormon paid attention to how it is served. The Lord’s “keystone of our religion” is beautifully prepared for us, with its narratives, rhythms, and imagery helping engage all our senses (especially our spiritual sense) in gaining its truths. Language directed to the intellect alone is not enough. Particularly in its poetry, the Book of Mormon, in the words of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “brings the whole soul of man into activity.”<sup>16</sup> With content often determining form and form revealing content, profound concerns are presented in ways that reach us deeply.

As literature, or belles lettres, the Book of Mormon has that medium’s advantages, which include memorability, ability to capture a reader’s attention, power to influence feelings or emotions, and capacity to do justice to the complexity of life.<sup>17</sup> The Book of Mormon is a work of immediacy that, as significant literature does, *shows* as well as *tells*.

Narrations, sermons, letters, prophecies, and dialogues are presented as living voices. Nephi involves me in his world and allows me to identify with him when he begins his narration with “I, Nephi.” Mormon calls on me to recognize the point of his narrations with expressions such as “and thus we see.” And as though time has collapsed, Moroni forthrightly declares, “I speak unto you as if ye were present, . . . and I know *your* doing” (Mormon 8:35).<sup>18</sup>

Because so many discourses and dialogues are presented directly in the Book of Mormon, distances break down and time dissolves. I become an implied participant with Ammon in the court of Lamoni; I join the crowd listening

to Alma respond to Korihor with pure testimony and the power of God; and, especially, I am there when the Savior descends to the gathered Nephites and Lamanites at Bountiful. With much direct quotation, Jesus Christ speaks to me in his own voice. “Another Testament of Jesus Christ” is not only *about* Christ but *by* him.

Some might think that since Nephi affirms the plainness of his writing (see for example 2 Nephi 25:7, 33:6), it is unliterary. Quite the contrary. Nephi uses poetic and rhetorical rhythms and structures with powerful effectiveness. By the word “plain” he means “easy to understand” (1Nephi 14:23, 16:29)—and indeed, impossible to be misunderstood (2 Nephi 25:7, 28). Perhaps it is Nephi’s claim to such a style, however, that has kept many from thinking about the book in literary terms. As Nibley has commented, it contains none of the “fantastic imagery, the romantic descriptions, and the unflinching exaggerations that everyone expected in the literature of [Joseph Smith’s] time.”<sup>19</sup>

The Book of Mormon has a power of effectiveness that paradoxically is hidden because it is so obvious—much as Edgar Allan Poe’s purloined letter was hidden in plain sight and thus overlooked. The expressions and rhythms of the Book of Mormon are all intended—if not always consciously by writers such as Nephi and Moroni, at least by the primary author of the book. Indeed, I become more and more convinced that every sentence counts in the Book of Mormon.

### Style and Tone

The writers of the Book of Mormon show an intense concern for style and tone—for the way they communicate and for their relationship to the matter communicated and to their audience. Like the prophet Alma, each writer desires to be able to “speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth,” yet realizes that “I am a man, and do sin in my wish. . . . I do not glory of myself, but I glory in that which the Lord hath commanded me” (Alma 29:1, 3, 9). Alma’s tone is one of humility. Other writers also are humble and feel inadequate in writing. This is especially true of the last writer, Moroni: “If there are faults they are the mistakes of men,” Moroni writes in the title page; “wherefore, condemn not the things of God.”<sup>20</sup> He thus appeals directly to his reader to be accepting of his imperfections. In a prayer he laments, “Lord, the Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing. . . . Thou hast also made our words powerful and great, even that we cannot write them; wherefore, when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words” (Ether 12:23, 25). The Lord responds, “My grace is sufficient for the meek, that they shall take no advantage of your weakness” (Ether 12:26).

Moroni’s words to a future audience, however, are the opposite of what we might consider weak: In cadences of ascending power he boldly declares that

the eternal purposes of the Lord shall roll on, until all his promises shall be fulfilled. . . . O ye pollutions, ye hypocrites, ye teachers, who sell yourselves for that which will canker, why have ye polluted the holy church of God? Why are ye ashamed to take upon you the name of Christ? . . . And now, behold, who can stand against the works of the Lord? Who can deny his sayings? Who will rise up against the almighty power of the Lord? Who will despise the works of the Lord? Who will despise the children of Christ? Behold, all ye who are despisers of the works of the Lord, for ye shall wonder and perish. (Mormon 8:22, 38; 9:26)

Although Moroni earlier has lamented his limitations in writing, in his last words he beautifully integrates expressions of Isaiah:

And awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled. Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness;

and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:31–33; compare Isaiah 52:1, 54:2)

A model for communication is Jesus, who, Moroni reports, “told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in mine own language, concerning these things; and only a few have I written, because of my weakness in writing” (Ether 12:39–40). Two concepts in this report are repeated throughout the Book of Mormon: plain speech and inability to write about some things. “I have spoken plainly unto you,” Nephi says, “that ye cannot misunderstand”; “my soul delighteth in plainness,” he continues, “for after this manner doth the Lord God work among the children of men” (2 Nephi 25:28, 31:3). Yet Nephi also delights in the words of Isaiah, which “are not plain unto you” although “they are plain unto all those that are filled with the spirit of prophecy” (2 Nephi 25:4). In the Book of Mormon we have both the plain and the veiled language, and we learn about each from the other.

Mormon’s inability to write about some certain things often has to do with confinement of space; in other instances, though, Mormon is either forbidden to write or the words are so exalted that man cannot speak or write them. As an example of the latter, in a scene in which a mob is intent on killing two prophets named Nephi and Lehi, the piercing voice of God twice calls on the people to repent. The third time, the voice “did speak unto them marvelous words which cannot be uttered by man” (Helaman 5:33).

This event prefigures the scene not long after in which a multitude visited by the resurrected Jesus twice hear a voice from heaven but do not understand it; nevertheless, “notwithstanding it being a small voice it did pierce them that did hear to the center, insomuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn” (3 Nephi 11:3). The third time they hear the voice, it says simply yet profoundly, “Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him” (3 Nephi 11:7). Here at the meeting point between the mortal and divine we feel the intense power both of the word and of divine communication beyond speech. The people do hear Jesus, and later in responding to his prayers, they have an experience that transcends mortal language: “And their hearts were open and they did understand in their hearts the words which he prayed. Nevertheless, so great and marvelous were the words which he prayed that they cannot be written, neither can they be uttered by man” (3 Nephi 19:33–34).

The experiences of the Nephites with the resurrected Savior show the extreme possibilities and limitations of communication. Christ expounded unto the multitude all things, “both great and small,” and “even babes did open their mouths and utter marvelous things” (3 Nephi 26:1, 16). Yet the things the babes said “were forbidden that there should not any man write them” (3 Nephi 26:16); those people who were filled with the Holy Ghost “saw and heard unspeakable things, which are not lawful to be written” (3 Nephi 26:18); and, as he has been commanded, Mormon records only “a lesser part of the things which [the Savior] taught the people” (3 Nephi 26:8).

The styles Mormon and other narrators employ range widely from the simple and unadorned to the lofty and poetic.<sup>21</sup> The tones range from humblest pleading to denunciation: “Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive,” Jesus says; “O ye wicked and perverse and stiffnecked people,” Moroni declares, “why have ye built up churches unto yourselves to get gain?” (3 Nephi 9:14; Mormon 8:33). These styles and tones will be of interest in the chapters that follow as we read and analyze the integrated

form and content of such pieces as the epigrammatic poetry of Lehi, the intricate psalm of Nephi, the rhetorically persuasive sermons of Jacob, the chiasmic speech of King Benjamin, the dramatic encounter between Alma and Korihor, the lament of Mormon, and the parting testimony of Moroni.

### **Purposes of the Book of Mormon**

**Literary elements in the Book of Mormon such as form, word choice, imagery, poetry, and narrative are part of the God-designed nature of the book to develop the primary purposes set out in the title page. The first of these purposes is to show the Lamanites, identified as a remnant of the House of Israel, the “great things the Lord hath done for their fathers” (especially Nephi and Lehi), and to help them “know the covenants of the Lord,” which assure them “that they are not cast off forever.” Second, the book is designed to convince “the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.” Of course, what is true for one of the three audiences for the Book of Mormon can be applied to another.**

The title page can be considered a table of contents for the Book of Mormon. Its major ideas are repeated elsewhere in Nephi’s writings as well as in those of Mormon and Moroni, and those ideas give force to the major concerns of the book. For example, in extended comments about himself and his role, Mormon says that his work helps fulfill the prayers of the holy ones that the gospel would come in the latter days to the Lamanites. Mormon acknowledges the great thing the Lord has done in delivering Lehi and his family (“he brought our fathers out of the land of Jerusalem”) and connects it with the deliverance of souls (“he hath given me and my people so much knowledge unto the salvation of our souls” [3 Nephi 5:20]). God shall “bring a remnant of the seed of Joseph [present-day Lamanites] to the knowledge of the Lord their God”; he shall restore to them “the knowledge of the covenant that he hath covenanted with them” (3 Nephi 5:23, 25). And all the house of Jacob shall “know their Redeemer, who is Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (3 Nephi 5:26).

In the chapters that follow, we will discover ways in which the purposes of the Book of Mormon as generally stated in the title page are shown forth by various literary elements.<sup>22</sup> They correspond with the main genres literary critic Leland Ryken finds in the Bible: “narrative or story, poetry (especially lyric poetry), proverb, and visionary writing (including both prophecy and apocalypse). . . . The letters of the New Testament frequently become literary because of their artistic and poetic style.”<sup>23</sup>

Although several aspects of literature are involved in each purpose set forth in the title page, I will emphasize one or two per chapter. Thus, in Chapter 2 the focus is on narrators of the book and on selected narratives. These narratives “show unto the remnant of the House of Israel” the great things done for their fathers—heroic persons such as Nephi, Jacob, Ammon, and Alma.

The next chapter connects epic elements in the Book of Mormon that show “what great things the Lord hath done.” The major thousand-year story of the origin, development, and eventual destruction of the Nephite civilization is in its very nature an epic. Contained within this Nephite epic is the story of the Jaredites, which, Nibley persuasively argues, comes right out of an epic milieu.<sup>24</sup> In the largest sense, the Book of Mormon may also be considered as having the timelessness, sweep of significance, and scope of meaning of cosmic drama.

Chapter 4, “By the Spirit of Prophecy,” emphasizes the many instances of Hebraic-like poetry in the Book of Mormon. In it I will point out how a claim David Noel Freedman makes for the Bible often holds for the Book of Mormon as well. Freedman says that “the speeches of angels and other inspired persons are in the form of poetry.”<sup>25</sup> The beautiful and sometimes complex poetry of the Book of Mormon is concealed by the English translation’s prose format. In passages that I have placed in verse form to reveal their poetry, the manner in which something is said often contains, suggests, and develops its meaning.

The following chapter, “Know the Covenants of the Lord,” dwells on sermons. These sermons can be considered belles lettres if they reveal that careful and artistic attention has been paid to form as well as content. Several of the ten sermons we will look at, which often contain poetry and word-play, lend themselves well to rhetorical analysis of the type classics professor George Kennedy applies to the Bible in *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*.<sup>26</sup> In comparing sermons, we will find that strikingly different approaches are taken with different audiences.

Chapter 6 treats the “fathers” mentioned in the title page of the Book of Mormon as they present themselves in letters and autobiography. We will examine eight letters for contrasting tones and personalities. As with the sermons, I analyze letters for the nature and effectiveness of the message they send. With the Moroni-Ammoron and Moroni-Pahoran correspondence, we will have particular interest in the way the writers respond to each other. Autobiography is connected with letters in revealing personalities. It figures prominently in the book, with Nephi, Enos, Mormon, and others speaking directly about their own experiences.

Chapter 7 picks up on the phrase “not cast off forever” to develop the implications of imagery in the Book of Mormon. A literary approach considers the kinds of images in the Book of Mormon and their relationships and takes the view that the book’s truths are approached vitally and vibrantly *through* the imagery. Of principal interest is the polarity in images illustrating the prophet Lehi’s understanding that “it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11). Our study of imagery includes direct imagery as well as figurative devices such as simile and metaphor, and it expands to consider such matters as symbolism and archetypal imagery.

Chapter 8, “That Jesus Is the Christ,” deals mainly with typology. As with the Old Testament, the Book of Mormon is filled with types and shadows. Moreover, Book of Mormon prophets make conscious and overt reference to them—especially Abinadi in teaching that all the performances and ordinances of the law of Moses “were types of things to come” (Mosiah 13:31). The chapter considers persons, categories of persons, objects or events, and the Book of Mormon itself as types.

The concluding chapter, “At the Judgment-Seat of Christ,” develops the largest implications of a literary approach to the Book of Mormon. Here we will look at the whole book in terms of liminal (threshold) persons, places, and actions, and will review the Book of Mormon as prophecy. Designed for our day, the book points through time to timelessness, through this world to the next, culminating in the last judgment.

## Notes

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Address at the Opening of the Concord Free Public Library,” in *Miscellanies*, vol. 11 of *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1911), 501.
2. William Wordsworth, “Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*,” in *English Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 363.
3. Robert Frost, “Education by Poetry: A Meditative Monologue” and “The Constant Symbol,” in *Robert Frost: An Introduction*, ed. Robert A. Greenberg and James G. Hepburn (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), 84, 87.
4. Orson F. Whitney, “Oratory, Poesy and Prophecy,” *Improvement Era* 29 (April and May 1926): 530, 628.

5. Here, as with all Book of Mormon phrases and verses quoted and set as poetry in this book, lineation has been added.

6. Although this is the first book-length examination of the literary qualities of the Book of Mormon, several people have written on many aspects of the topic. One of the first to consider this approach was Roy A. West, who looked at literary forms and values in the Book of Mormon in his *An Introduction to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: LDS Department of Education, 1940). Another early treatment is Evan Shute's article, "The Book of Mormon as Literature," which appeared in *The Saints' Herald*, 27 February 1943. "As it is primarily a theological work," Shute notes, "a 'Golden Bible,' one naturally turns to the Hebrew Bible for comparisons." To him, the Book of Mormon "has much of the Mosaic thunder, much of the noble melodrama of Daniel, and great stretches reminiscent of Isaiah (who is extensively quoted) and of Jeremiah and their lesser brethren. It contains much of the personal, simple, quotable teaching of the Gospels and a great deal of theological exposition, suggesting Paul and the great apostles" (7, 8). "The Book of Mormon as Literature" was also the title of a highly detailed radio address given in 1946 by Franklin S. Harris, Jr. It was published in *The Book of Mormon Message and Evidences* (Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1953). In another pioneering work on the topic that was developed at the same time, Sidney B. Sperry defined various literary types found in the Book of Mormon and wrote out the Psalm of Nephi in poetic form (see note 22, below, for a more detailed discussion of Sperry's work). In 1947, Robert K. Thomas completed a B.A. thesis at Reed College entitled, "A Literary Analysis of the Book of Mormon." In it he defined these various literary types found in the Book of Mormon: narrative prose, poetry, parable, oratory, prophetic discourse, symbolic prophecy, prophecy of vision, prophetic dialogue, pastorals, and war letters. He subsequently published his main findings in a summary article, "A Literary Critic Looks at the Book of Mormon," in *To the Glory of God*, ed. Charles D. Tate, Jr., and Truman G. Madsen (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 149–61. Thomas's discussion on diversity of style is anticipated in a brief reference to the topic by James E. Talmage in chapter 15 of *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1913).

7. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, IV. vi. 152. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, vol. 1 of *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. William Charvat et al. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1962), 260.

8. Arthur Henry King, in "Language Themes in Jacob 5: 'The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel (Isaiah 5:7),' " in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 171, says the richness of the Book of Mormon "cannot be properly appreciated unless the book is read aloud and listened to."

9. The text of the Book of Mormon cited throughout by book, chapter, and verse is the one published in 1981 by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Other texts consulted are the 1830 edition (in a 1980 facsimile) and the three-volume *Book of Mormon Critical Text: A Tool for Scholarly Reference* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1984–87).

10. Gary Lee Walker elaborates the lessons for our time found in 3 Nephi in his essay "The Downfall of the Nephite Nation: Lessons for Our Time (3 Nephi 6–10)," in Kent P. Jackson, ed., *Alma 30 to Moroni*, Studies in Scripture Series, vol. 8 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988).

11. In *Ensign* 16 (November 1986): 6. In his October 1986 Conference address, President Benson reaffirmed what he had said in the April 1975 general conference ("The Book of Mormon Is the Word of God," *Ensign* 5 [May 1975]: 63): "The Book of Mormon was written for us today. God is the author of the book. . . . Mormon, the ancient

prophet after whom the book is named, abridged centuries of records. God, who knows the end from the beginning, told him what to include in his abridgment that we would need for our day.” Daniel H. Ludlow expressed much the same view in his article “The Book of Mormon Was Written for Our Day,” *Instructor* (July 1966): 265: “Through the power of vision and prophecy, these writers were shown the people of our day, for whom they were writing their records. Thus, from the voluminous records at their disposal, they were able to select those principles and experiences which would be most useful in helping us to meet our challenges and solve our problems.”

12. Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 365.

13. *Ibid.*, 500.

14. Gordon B. Hinckley, in October 1979 general conference, published in “An Angel from on High, the Long, Long Silence Broke,” *Ensign* 9 (November 1979): 8.

15. Boyd K. Packer, *Teach Ye Diligently* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 227–28.

16. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria in English Romantic Poetry and Prose*, 427.

17. Leland Ryken finds these characteristics in biblical literature in *How to Read The Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Academie Books, 1984), 23.

18. Here, as with all italicized Book of Mormon words and phrases quoted in this book, the italics have been added.

19. Nibley, *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 68.

20. Joseph Smith attributed the writing of the title page to Moroni: “I wish to mention here that the title-page of the Book of Mormon is a literal translation, taken from the very last leaf, on the left hand side of the collection or book of plates, which contained the record which has been translated, the language of the whole running the same as all Hebrew writing in general” (Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev. [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932–51], 1:71).

21. Robert K. Thomas examines varying styles in his 1947 Reed College thesis. Glade L. Burgon provides an extensive treatment of style in his 1958 Brigham Young University M.A. thesis, “An Analysis of Style Variations in the Book of Mormon.” Regarding the writings of Moroni, he concludes that they are “made beautiful and impressive by the abundance of well formed synthetical and antithetical parallelisms” (43).

22. The types, or genres, dealt with in this book are ones more narrowly considered under belletristic literature. A broader list of genres in the Book of Mormon is provided by Sidney B. Sperry in his pioneering work, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970), which was an expansion of his earlier work *Our Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1947). Much of *Our Book of Mormon* has been reprinted in a special issue of *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4, no. 1 (1995). Sperry gives the following literary types: allegory, didactic exposition, editorial reflection or commentary, epistle, exhortation, genealogy, gospel, historical narrative, hortatory discourse, lamentation, memoir, oratory, patriarchal admonition, patriarchal blessing, prayer, prophecy of doom, prophetic dialogue, prophetic discourse, prophetic narrative, prophetic prediction, psalm, religious teaching, revelation, sermon, song of praise, symbolic prophecy, and war epistle. Additional types are aphorism, apocalyptic writing, judgment, and farewell speech.

23. Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1987), 16.
24. Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 214.
25. David Noel Freedman, "Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: An Essay on Biblical Poetry," in *The Bible in Its Literary Milieu*, ed. John R. Maier and Vincent L. Tollers (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1979), 95.
26. George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).