

"Know the Covenants of the Lord" - Sermons

King Benjamin may have given the most effective sermon ever recorded. We are told that *all* the people listening to him, except for the little children, who were not accountable, were so moved by his sermon that they “entered into a covenant with God to keep his commandments” and took “upon them the name of Christ” (Mosiah 6:1–2). The effectiveness of this sermon continues with those who experience it today. King Benjamin’s address, together with other sermons selected by inspired writers of the Book of Mormon, helps the “remnant of the House of Israel . . . know the covenants of the Lord” (title page). Some other noteworthy prophetic discourses that provide knowledge of the covenants and stir people to accept them (or challenge people who are unwilling to accept them) are Jacob’s sermon in 2 Nephi 6–10; Alma’s sermon to the people of Zarahemla (Alma 5); Alma’s contrasting sermon (in Alma 7) to the people in Gideon; Alma’s challenge to the people of Ammonihah (Alma 9:8–30); Alma’s impromptu follow-up to Amulek’s response to Zeezrom (Alma 12:3–13:30); the words of King Anti-Nephi-Lehi (Alma 24:7–16); Alma’s discourse on faith to the poor Zoramites (Alma 32:8–33:23); the Savior’s sermon on Israel found in 3 Nephi 20–23;¹ and Mormon’s sermon on faith, hope, and charity (Moroni 7).²

The power of a Book of Mormon sermon comes from a combination of all its elements. The prophetic discourse is designed to appeal to the spirit, the mind, and the emotions. Close analysis of the nine sermons mentioned above will show how they are crafted artistically and have great rhetorical effectiveness.

Before looking at these sermons for content regarding covenants, however, we need to know what Moroni in the title page might have meant by “covenants of the Lord.” The covenant had many dimensions, promises, and obligations, including the following: Lehi and his family brought with them knowledge of the Lord’s covenant that through Abraham’s seed “shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed” (1 Nephi 15:18). As Nephi taught so powerfully (2 Nephi 31:10–20), they covenanted by baptism to keep the commandments—which were the “words of the covenant, the ten commandments” (Exodus 34:28) as well as the rites and observances of the law of Moses. Although as Jacob put it, the Nephites saw themselves as “a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers . . . in a wilderness” (Jacob 7:26), they were comforted by covenants that they would inherit a land “choice above all other lands” (1 Nephi 13:30, 2 Nephi 1:5). As “the covenant people of the Lord” (1 Nephi 15:14), they were entitled to the promises made to the house of Israel. Especially, they fulfilled the promise made to Joseph the patriarch that a remnant of his seed would be a “righteous branch unto the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 3:5) and that his descendants would not be completely destroyed (2 Nephi 3:23, 9:53). The promise is that after a period of spiritual darkness, when they come to believe in Christ, they shall be restored “unto the lands of their inheritance” (2 Nephi 10:7). In sum,

at that day shall the remnant of our seed know that they are of the house of Israel, and that they are the covenant people of the Lord; and then shall they know and come to the knowledge of their forefathers, and also to the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer, which was ministered unto their fathers by him; wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved. (1 Nephi 15:14)

The reward to an individual who serves God and keeps his commandments “in all things” is eternal life (Mosiah 5:5, 15). According to the words of Jesus Christ recorded by Mormon, if Gentiles covenant by baptism, they “may receive a remission of [their] sins, and be filled with the Holy Ghost, that [they] may be numbered with my people who are of the house of Israel” (3 Nephi 30:2). Those who “by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power,” Moroni says, are “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 10:33). The covenanted descendants of those whom the resurrected Savior addressed will reside in a New Jerusalem. "And the powers of heaven shall be in the midst of this people; yea, even I will be in the midst of you" (3 Nephi 20:22).

King Benjamin's Address

Though King Benjamin wants his people to transfer their allegiance to their new king, his son Mosiah, his main purpose in gathering his people and speaking to them is to cement their allegiance to their heavenly king.³ He desires that his people covenant to keep all of God's commandments and take upon them a new name: They "shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you." Then if they are obedient unto the end of their lives, they are promised they "shall be found at the right hand of God" (Mosiah 5:7, 9).⁴

Apparently all of King Benjamin's people have come together on short notice, eager to listen to their beloved king (Mosiah 2:1).⁵ Reading between the lines, we assume that the people are previously baptized church members who are confident they are righteous (King Benjamin says "they have been a diligent people in keeping the commandments of the Lord" [Mosiah 1:11]); they observe the law of Moses (Mosiah 2:3); and they have come "that they might give thanks to the Lord their God" for actions on the part of the Lord and others (Mosiah 2:4). What they do not realize, though, is that this type of observance, including their prayers of gratitude, is passive and low-level obedience. Indeed, the assembled people may have been self-satisfied in thinking they were keeping all God's commandments by avoiding such sins as theft and murder (Mosiah 2:13). Further, they have a tendency to be proud; the king asks, "Of what have ye to boast?" (Mosiah 2:24). Given their self-satisfaction, we may imagine the people's shock in hearing their kind old king say, "I have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together that I might rid my garments of your blood" (Mosiah 2:28), and to say that the unrepentant person among them is "in open rebellion against God" (Mosiah 2:37).

King Benjamin's last address to his people is carefully structured into four main parts. Besides teaching his people humility, King Benjamin initially tries to move them beyond passive obedience to active involvement and higher levels of perception. He calls for action in saying, "Hearken unto me, and open your ears that ye may hear, and your hearts that ye may understand, and your minds that the mysteries of God may be unfolded to your view" (Mosiah 2:9). He teaches them by both precept and example to render unselfish service—by which they serve God. The second part of his address pertains to the atonement of Jesus Christ. Then, after the people manifest their repentance, King Benjamin develops the application of his speech, calling on the people continually to have faith, repent, and be merciful and righteous. The fourth part of King Benjamin's religious instruction begins with his request to know if the people believe his words. Their affirmation shows they have now reached the final stage King Benjamin desired.

The speech combines rhetorical forms George Kennedy finds in both the Old Testament and New Testament. "In the Old Testament," Kennedy says,

the most characteristic form of speech to an audience already disposed to believe is the "covenant speech," an address built on the assumption of a covenant between God and the people of Israel. The general pattern of a covenant speech is, first, to strengthen the authority of the Lord by reminding the audience of what he has done; second, to add new commandments; and third, to conclude with a warning of what will happen if the commandments are disregarded. . . . A second form of rhetoric in the Old Testament is that of prophecy. If the covenant speech deals with the past, and thus has resemblance to

classical judicial oratory, prophecy looks to the future and adapts the message of the covenant to future circumstances, thus resembling deliberative oratory.⁶

In the New Testament, Kennedy says, preaching is “not persuasion, but proclamation, and is based on authority and grace, not on proof.”⁷ Combining these forms, King Benjamin reminds the people what the Lord has done, refers to new commandments that will be delivered to them by his son Mosiah, and reminds them of “the awful situation of those that have fallen into transgression” (Mosiah 2:40). He prophesies of Christ’s coming, and he proclaims by authority, speaking “the words which the Lord God hath commanded” him (Mosiah 3:20, 23). The people are thus awakened to a sense of their nothingness by a knowledge of the goodness, power, and wisdom of God.

Taking Kennedy’s *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* as a guide, we can see how King Benjamin’s covenant speech first persuades the audience to reaffirm a present point of view and then becomes deliberative rhetoric aimed “at effecting a decision about future action, often the very immediate future.”⁸ (Kennedy’s philosophical justification for approaching the New Testament through classical rhetoric is applicable as well to the Book of Mormon: “Though rhetoric is colored by the traditions and conventions of the society in which it is applied, it is also a universal phenomenon which is conditioned by basic workings of the human mind and heart and by the nature of all human society.”⁹)

King Benjamin begins his address with an exordium, or preface, “which seeks to obtain the attention of the audience and goodwill or sympathy toward the speaker.”¹⁰ The preface extends from verse 9 to verse 16 of Mosiah 2, with verse 17 functioning as a transition: “when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.” The people are already favorably disposed toward King Benjamin, believing they have “a just man to be their king” (Mosiah 2:4). Nevertheless, he has an important strategy in reminding the people at length that he has not sought riches or imposed high taxes on them but rather has labored to serve them. He has not imprisoned them or allowed them to enslave and persecute each other but has taught them to keep the Lord’s commandments. Having stirred up their feelings of gratitude for him, he then transfers that gratitude to God, declaring, “And behold also, if I, whom ye call your king, who has spent his days in your service, and yet has been in the service of God, do merit any thanks from you, O how you ought to thank your heavenly King!” (Mosiah 2:19)

Thanks, though, are not enough. Benjamin clarifies the people’s true relationship to God in a series of “if . . . then” statements, saying, for example, “If ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants” (Mosiah 2:21). That leads to the proposition about covenant making that Benjamin wishes to elaborate: “And behold, all that he requires of you is to keep his commandments” (Mosiah 2:22). Benjamin ends his proposition with a summary statement that he has served his people with a clear conscience. He is then ready to stir them to repent.

The three modes of artistic proof Kennedy details are evident in King Benjamin’s address: ethos, “the credibility that the author or speaker is able to establish in his work”; pathos, the appeal to emotions; and logos, “the logical argument found within the discourse.”¹¹ Those elements correspond incompletely to terms that Kennedy in *Classical Rhetoric* considers to be more appropriate to Judeo-Christian rhetoric: “grace, authority, and logos, the divine message which can be understood by man.”¹² Benjamin’s long service as a just and beloved king is sufficient to establish his credibility, and he builds upon it by reminding them that he has been chosen by the people, consecrated by his father, and permitted by the Lord to be a ruler and king over the people. His statements gain

integrity and power by their being the last words of a dying king: “And ye behold that I am old, and am about to yield up this mortal frame to its mother earth” (Mosiah 2:26).¹³

The greatest authority, though, comes in what Kennedy calls “radical Christian rhetoric,” in which the speaker is a vehicle of God’s will.¹⁴ King Benjamin affirms that authority by quoting the words given him by an angel from God (Mosiah 3:2–27). That is the central part of King Benjamin’s address. Quoting the angel, this humble king teaches concerning the coming Messiah and the atonement He offers. He calls the people to repentance—which is both a turning away from the “natural man” and turning toward Christian living with childlike humility. He explains the purpose of the law of Moses, and he clarifies the judgment of Christ. In concluding his quotation from the angel, King Benjamin evokes a portrait of evil people who are “consigned to an awful view of their own guilt and abominations, which doth cause them to shrink from the presence of the Lord into a state of misery and endless torment.” They have “drunk out of the cup of the wrath of God” and their torment “is as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames are unquenchable, and whose smoke ascendeth” (Mosiah 3:25–27).

Both in their attitudes and their words, the people respond immediately to each of the main points King Benjamin has made. They had been passively sitting in their tents so that they might “hear the words which king Benjamin should speak unto them” (Mosiah 2:6). When Benjamin finishes speaking, the multitude fall to the earth as though they were shrinking from the presence of the Lord, “for the fear of the Lord had come upon them” (Mosiah 4:1). This physical falling is emblematic of what King Benjamin calls their “worthless and fallen state” (Mosiah 4:5). He has taught them that they are not “even as much as the dust of the earth” and urged them to put off worldliness and become sanctified “through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 2:25; 3:19). In response, they view themselves “in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth” and pray for mercy through the atonement of Christ, after which they receive a remission of their sins and are filled with joy (Mosiah 4:2–3).

After that response, King Benjamin reiterates all the main points of his sermon, including those of the angel’s message:

If the knowledge of the goodness of God at this time has awakened you to a sense of your nothingness, and . . . if ye have come to a knowledge of . . . the atonement which has been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord, and should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life, I mean the life of the mortal body—I say, that this is the man who receiveth salvation. (Mosiah 4:5–7)

The diligence in keeping God’s commandments includes imparting “your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants” (Mosiah 4:26). This physically trembling but spiritually strong old man is a premier example of continuing in faith until the end of life. His own manifest purity of soul supports his injunction to “always retain a remission of your sins” (Mosiah 4:12).

At the end of this part of the sermon, King Benjamin specifically reaffirms his ethos (his credibility): he sends among the people desiring to know if they believe his words. As they had done before in praying for mercy, they make their response “with one voice” (Mosiah 5:1–2). They confess the “mighty change” which has been wrought in them and say they have “no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). They are “willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things that he shall command us, all the remainder of our days” (Mosiah 5:5). For his part, King Benjamin approves the

covenant and gives them a new name—that of Jesus Christ—which seals the covenant they have made. Finally, he takes down the names of those who had covenanted with God to keep his commandments.¹⁵

King Benjamin develops logos (the logical argument) by frequent use of the *enthymeme*, a syllogistic argument in which one of the premises is often suppressed. For example, Benjamin says, “As ye have kept my commandments . . . and have prospered, . . . even so if ye shall keep the commandments of my son, or the commandments of God which shall be delivered unto you by him, ye shall prosper in the land” (Mosiah 2:31). Again, “If God, who has created you, . . . doth grant unto you whatsoever ye ask that is right, . . . O then, how ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have one to another” (Mosiah 4:21).

Although King Benjamin uses logic, he is most compelling in employing what Kennedy calls “radical Christian rhetoric.” That is, King Benjamin solemnly affirms repeatedly that his message comes from God by using phrases such as “spoken the words which the Lord gave,” “thus” and “thus hath the Lord commanded me.”

A figure of speech King Benjamin uses effectively is to begin a series of clauses with the same word, a device called *anaphora*, as in this passage:

Believe in God; *believe* that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; *believe* that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; *believe* that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend. And again, *believe* that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you *believe* all these things see that ye do them. (Mosiah 4:9–10)

The cumulative power of this figure is the climactic shift from *believe* to the injunction “see that ye *do* them.”

King Benjamin uses several other thought-provoking figures of speech. He employs antithesis by juxtaposing positives and negatives throughout; for example, “putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint” and “always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness” (Mosiah 3:19, 4:11). He poses rhetorical questions, such as, “Can ye say aught of yourselves? I answer you, Nay. Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth” (Mosiah 2:25). He constructs analogies to teach his point vividly: “Doth a man take an ass which belongeth to his neighbor, and keep him? I say unto you, Nay; he will not even suffer that he shall feed among his flocks, but will drive him away, and cast him out. I say unto you, that even so shall it be among you if ye know not the name by which ye are called” (Mosiah 5:14). He employs comparison to help his people relate to his words: “Ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish. . . . For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have?” (Mosiah 4:16, 19). And he uses the ancient Hebrew device of chiasmus, or inversion.

As John Welch has demonstrated, “Chiastic repetitions occur frequently in Benjamin’s rhetoric.”¹⁶ His coronation proclamation is balanced by a later covenant proclamation (Mosiah 5:1–5). The subsequent call for obedience to divine laws the people have been taught (Mosiah 2:31–41) is repeated in specific admonitions to keep the laws of love and service (Mosiah 4:13–30). The angel’s declaration of Christ’s atoning mission for the salvation of mankind (Mosiah 3:2–10) is balanced by Benjamin’s later testimony of the goodness and glory of God and his salvation (Mosiah 4:4–12). The chiasm is bracketed by the opening instructions regarding physical creation, a covenant people, and exaltation, and the closing references to the people being spiritually begotten and knowing God by serving him as a covenant people.¹⁷ Welch further points out that the central statement of the speech—the need for atonement and purification—is constructed as an elaborate chiasm. The crossing point, or center, is the

possibility of reconciliation or the alternative of damnation found in Mosiah 3:11–27, focused precisely on the chiasmic centerpiece in Mosiah 3:18–19. “Benjamin tells his nation that they will be lost unless:

a) They *humble* themselves b) and become as little *children* c) believing that salvation is in the *atonement blood of Christ*; d) for the *natural man* e) is an enemy to God f) and *has been* from the fall of Adam f') and *will be* forever and ever e') unless ye yieldeth to the *Holy Spirit* d') and putteth off the *natural man* c') and becometh a saint through the *atonement of Christ* b') and becometh as a *child* a') submissive, meek and *humble* (Mosiah 3:18–19).¹⁸

The power of this figure is both its memorability and its intense focus on the center of the chiasm. Itself found in the center of the angel’s message, this chiasm turns on the larger concern with the atonement of Christ and shows how that atonement can be accepted. The two central phrases emphasize what is true for all past history and for the future unless one immediately follows the steps in the second part of the chiasm.

Welch also reveals the following chiasm near the end of Benjamin’s speech in which the repetition is precise and meaningful:

a) And . . . whosoever shall not take upon him the *name of Christ* b) must be *called* by some other name; c) therefore, he findeth himself *on the left hand of God*. d) And I would that ye should *remember* also, that this is *the name* that I said I should give unto you e) that never should be *blotted out*, f) except it be through *transgression*; f') therefore, take heed that ye do not *transgress*, e') that the name be not *blotted out* of your hearts. d') I say unto you, I would that ye should *remember* to retain *the name* written always in your hearts, c') that ye are not found *on the left hand of God*, b') but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be *called*, a') and also, the *name* by which he shall call you. (Mosiah 5:10–12)¹⁹

Again, the crossing point of the chiasm emphasizes the central point: to take heed not to transgress and then to do what is necessary to be called by the name of Christ.

The last chiasm is also part of the epilogue, or peroration—King Benjamin’s final words to his audience. He concludes his intricately prepared address with a clear yet elevated appeal. His injunction achieves its effect through rhythmic intensification of words or phrases. The final plea is both overarching and quietly simple:

Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things, in heaven and in earth, who is God above all. (Mosiah 5:15)

Jacob’s Sermon

In his sermon in 2 Nephi 6 through 10, Jacob has a purpose similar to Benjamin’s. He wants to stir his people to repentance, confirm covenants with them, and rid himself of their blood (sins). But Jacob differs strikingly from King Benjamin, showing forth his unique personality.²⁰ King Benjamin is calm and deliberate in his sermon; Jacob exhibits an exclamatory style. For instance, he says “How great . . . !” five times, in addition to “O the greatness . . . !” twice. (King Benjamin does not use this expression at all.) Jacob says to his people that his “anxiety is great” (2 Nephi 6:3) for them. In showing this anxiety, Jacob makes a personal appeal—indicated in part by his referring to his “beloved brethren” thirteen times. Too, while King Benjamin four times says, “I would that ye should remember,” Jacob more directly (and more frequently—eleven times) urges his people to “remember.”

Jacob's sermon develops poetically from his consideration of Isaiah's prophecies about the destiny of Israel and the Lord's promises that Israel will be restored. Jacob introduces his remarks by saying he will read the words of Isaiah, which "may be likened unto you" (2 Nephi 6:5)—meaning his "beloved brethren" and their descendants. Then he reads aloud and applies scriptures found in Isaiah 49, 50, 51, 52, and 55.

Jacob's sermon is carefully elaborated and rhetorically powerful.²¹ It moves from the rational to the emotive in what Kennedy in *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* would classify as a deliberative sermon—one designed to persuade an audience "to take some action in the future."²² The action is primarily remembering and reaffirming covenants, while the context may well be, as John Lundquist and John Welch persuasively argues, a coronation.²³

Jacob begins by firmly establishing his authority. He has been called of God and ordained after his holy order, he was consecrated by his brother Nephi the king, and he speaks the words his brother desired he should speak. This is not Jacob's first sermon to the people (2 Nephi 6:2), but it is the first one Nephi reports. It follows Nephi's telling us that he consecrated Jacob and Joseph to be "priests and teachers over the land" (2 Nephi 6:2, 5:26). Nephi may have selected this sermon because it so thoroughly expounds on the implications of Isaiah's prophecies regarding the fulfilling of God's covenants with the house of Israel (1 Nephi 14:17). The sermon centers on the mission of Jesus Christ, identified as the person Isaiah frequently calls the Holy One of Israel, and testifies that the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel, is Jesus. It also serves well as an introduction to the selections from Isaiah that eventually follow (2 Nephi 12–24).

Jacob's initial purpose is that his "beloved brethren" may "learn and glorify the name of [their] God" (2 Nephi 6:4). The first part of his sermon therefore contains extensive readings from Isaiah in presenting the sweep of the history of God's dealings with Israel; it emphasizes especially God as their deliverer.

The main weight of the sermon is found in 2 Nephi 9. Jacob follows the presentation of the text—Isaiah's prophecies—with what in a Puritan sermon would be called the doctrine.²⁴ His purpose in reading Isaiah, Jacob affirms, is so that his people "might know concerning the covenants of the Lord that he has covenanted with all the house of Israel" (2 Nephi 9:1). Then he explains step by step the relationship of the Fall and the Redemption. In doing so, he builds upon what Isaiah had taught (Isaiah 50:1–52:2) about the Messiah's sufferings in the meridian of time and the Lord's gathering of Israel in the last days.

For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfil the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection, and the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall; and the fall came by reason of transgression; and because man became fallen they were cut off from the presence of the Lord. Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement—save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption. (2 Nephi 9:6–7)

What follows is praise for the great plan of God, developed in declarations mostly beginning with O on this pattern: "O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace!" "O how great the goodness of ""O how great the plan of our God!" (2 Nephi 9:8, 10, 13).

After explaining the Atonement and clarifying the rewards of the righteous and unrighteous, Jacob gives a catalog of ten woes (and an eleventh implied woe) that come unto the disobedient and the sinner (2 Nephi 9:27–38). With increasing weight of repetition on the word wo, and with the balanced clauses that set forth actions and consequences, Jacob says:

But wo unto him that has the law given . . . and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state! . . . [Wo unto the learned who] think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God. . . . But wo unto the rich, who are rich as to the things of the world. For because they are rich they despise the poor, and they persecute the meek, and their hearts are upon their treasures; wherefore, their treasure is their god. And behold, their treasure shall perish with them also. And wo unto the deaf that will not hear; for they shall perish. Wo unto the blind that will not see; for they shall perish also. Wo unto the uncircumcised of heart, for a knowledge of their iniquities shall smite them at the last day. Wo unto the liar, for he shall be thrust down to hell. Wo unto the murderer who deliberately killeth, for he shall die. Wo unto them who commit whoredoms, for they shall be thrust down to hell. Yea, wo unto those that worship idols, for the devil of all devils delighteth in them. And, in fine, wo unto all those who die in their sins; for they shall return to God, and behold his face, and remain in their sins.²⁵ (2 Nephi 9:27–38)

Jacob ends his sermon with application to his auditors, calling on them to free themselves from iniquity and prepare their souls for God’s judgments. In a vivid symbolic gesture, Jacob says, “Behold, I take off my garments, and I shake them before you; I pray the God of my salvation that he view me with his all-searching eye; wherefore, ye shall know at the last day, when all men shall be judged of their works, that the God of Israel did witness that I shook your iniquities from my soul, and that I stand with brightness before him, and am rid of your blood” (2 Nephi 9:44).²⁶ With a turn on the action of shaking, Jacob then pleads poetically:

O, my beloved brethren, turn away from your sins; shake off the chains of him that would bind you fast; come unto that God who is the rock of your salvation.

(2 Nephi 9:45)

We can imagine Jacob continuing to shake his garments as he admonishes his listeners to shake off their chains of iniquity. Rather than be bound passively, they are to take action in attaching themselves to the rock of their salvation.

Jacob is aware of the impact of his sermon—which with the “plainness of the truth” is awakening his brethren “to an awful reality of these things” and is harrowing up their souls (2 Nephi 9:47). Pressing for action, he quotes Isaiah about buying “wine and milk without money and without price” (2 Nephi 9:50) and calls for an ascending order of involvement:

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)

After a sermon filled with pronouncements of woe upon specific sinners and a plain setting forth of the “awful reality” of their sinfulness, Jacob reverses his focus and gently leads his auditors to “come” and “feast” in “delight.”

The beautiful structure of this sermon is more apparent in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. In that edition, the sixteen paragraphs of the sermon flow in this manner (the paragraph numbers in the 1830 edition are followed by those of the 1981 edition verses in parentheses):

1 (1–2) *Past covenants*. Jacob affirms God’s covenants made with the house of Israel through time.

2 (3–7) *The resurrection*. While recognizing death, Jacob gives his witness of the promise of the resurrection.

3–5 (8–14) *Gratitude for the plan of salvation*. The prophet expresses gratitude for God’s mercy and grace, his goodness, and his plan of resurrection. Each utterance begins in a similar manner: “O the wisdom of God! his mercy and grace!” “O how great the goodness of our God,” “O how great the plan of our God!” (2 Nephi 9:8, 10, 13).

6 (15–16) *Judgment*. He explains the nature of the last judgment.

7–9 (17–26) *Atonement and way to accept it*. Jacob gives an ascending description of God’s great justice (reward to Saints), mercy (deliverance of Saints), and holiness (atonement and requirements of faith, repentance, baptism, or claim of mercy where no law is given). Each paragraph begins with recognition of the greatness of God: “O the greatness and the justice of our God!” “O the greatness of the mercy of our God, the Holy One of Israel!” “O how great the holiness of our God!” (2 Nephi 9:17, 19, 20).

10–12 (27–38) *Woes to the disobedient*. He pronounces woes upon those who have the law and transgress it, such as the rich who despise the poor.

13–16 (39–53) *Exhortation to Christian living*. In paragraphs beginning with a call to his “beloved brethren,” Jacob warns them to remember the awfulness in transgressing against God and then pleads with them to “remember the greatness of the Holy One of Israel,” to “come unto the Lord,” and to “turn away from [their] sins” (2 Nephi 9:40, 41, 45). Jacob closes with an injunction and testimony that link back to his initial concern with covenants and the house of Israel:

Behold, my beloved brethren, remember the words of your God; pray unto him continually by day, and give thanks unto his holy name by night. Let your hearts rejoice. And behold how great the covenants of the Lord, and how great his condescensions unto the children of men; and because of his greatness, and his grace and mercy, he has promised unto us that our seed shall not utterly be

destroyed, according to the flesh, but that he would preserve them; and in future generations they shall become a righteous branch unto the house of Israel. (2 Nephi 9:52–53)

Jacob seeks to persuade his audience to take action. He starts with a rational prophetic exposition and moves to the poetic oppositions of the central part of his sermon. He then calls for repentance and ends by beckoning to the people with such comforting words as *beloved*, *thanks*, *rejoice*, *condescensions*, *grace*, *mercy*, *preserve*, and *righteous*.

Promising to declare the remainder of his words the next day, Jacob dismisses his brethren. Then in the night, something dramatic happens: Jacob is visited by an angel who gives him a message that provides the climax to close Jacob’s sermon. The angel tells Jacob—and this is the first time in the Book of Mormon that this information is presented—that the name of the Redeemer who should come is Christ. This information is part of a revelation about important events in the history of Israel from the time of Christ’s first coming until the gathering of Israel in the last days. Deriving his authority from an angel of God, Jacob declares directly, “Thus saith the Lord God” (2 Nephi 10:7). (That is another example of what Kennedy calls “radical Christian rhetoric.”)

With language echoing Isaiah, Jacob quotes the Lord in telling how he will fulfill his promises. Speaking of the Jews, the Lord says: “When the day cometh that they shall believe in me, that I am Christ, then have I covenanted with their fathers that they shall be restored in the flesh, upon the earth, unto the lands of their inheritance” (2 Nephi 10:7). As for evildoers, “That my covenants may be fulfilled which I have made unto the children of men,” the Lord says, “I must needs destroy the secret works of darkness” (2 Nephi 10:15). The Lord’s covenant with the descendants of Lehi is that he will consecrate the land to them (2 Nephi 10:19). After setting forth the covenants in this manner, Jacob encourages his “beloved brethren” to “cheer up [their] hearts, and remember that [they] are free to act for [themselves]—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life” (2 Nephi 10:23).

Alma the Younger

Contrasting with the ceremonial style of King Benjamin and the highly poetic style of Jacob is the impassioned personal style of Alma, the son of Alma. Speaking out of his experience of conversion from being a “very wicked and an idolatrous man” who misled the people by “much flattery,” Alma reclaims others by “bearing down in pure testimony against them” (Mosiah 27:8, Alma 4:19). It might be said that Alma is beyond eloquence in that he strives for directness and simplicity.

Sermon at Zarahemla

Alma’s first recorded sermon is directed to the inhabitants of the capital city, Zarahemla. In calling the covenant-breaking church members of Zarahemla to repentance, Alma develops powerful images by appealing first to his father’s and then to his own experience. Alma the Elder and his converts (the “fathers” of Alma’s listeners) were in bondage to the Lamanites but because of their faith were miraculously delivered out of captivity. Alma asks, Do you today have a similar faith? The implicit answer is no. The captivity of his audience is a spiritual one, similar to that experienced by their fathers before they were converted. His appeal is that they likewise seek freedom from bondage: “Behold, [God] changed their hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God. Behold, they were in the midst of darkness; nevertheless, their souls were illuminated by the light of the everlasting word; yea, they were encircled about by the bands of death, and the chains of hell, and an everlasting destruction did await them” (Alma 5:7). This type of awakening is like Alma’s own conversion. Earlier, after being struck down, he had testified: “My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more” (Mosiah 27:29; see also Alma 36:18–20, 27).

Regarding the experience of “the fathers,” Alma concludes, there was a mighty change wrought in their hearts; consequently, “they were faithful until the end; therefore they were saved” (Alma 5:13). From that climax comes a long series of searching questions calling for self-examination. The first question is “I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?” (Alma 5:14). Additional questions build to the ironic question, “I say unto you, can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth?” (Alma 5:16). The ironic content is exposed by the following question: “Or do ye imagine to yourselves that ye can lie unto the Lord in that day, and say—Lord, our works have been righteous works upon the face of the earth—and that he will save you?” (Alma 5:17). Probing more deeply with each rhetorical question, Alma eventually asks, “I say unto you, can ye think of being saved when you have yielded yourselves to become subjects to the devil?” (Alma 5:20).

He answers his own question: “I say unto you, ye will know at that day that ye cannot be saved; for there can no man be saved except his garments are washed white; yea, his garments must be purified until they are cleansed

from all stain, through the blood of him of whom it has been spoken by our fathers, who should come to redeem his people from their sins” (Alma 5:21). To a people whose pride is often manifest in their clothes, Alma challenges them to be “stripped” of pride. “I say unto you, if ye are not ye are not prepared to meet God. . . . Behold, I say, is there one among you who is not stripped of envy? I say unto you that such an one is not prepared” (Alma 5:28–29). The dramatic summary of this phase of the sermon is “Yea, even wo unto all ye workers of iniquity; repent, repent, for the Lord God hath spoken it!” (Alma 5:32). In reaching this point, Alma has stressed the urgency of his message with references to “quickly” or “at hand” and has built it up rhythmically with such repeated phrases as “I say unto you” and “Wo unto.”

Alma then changes the nature of his appeal. Drawing on a series of common yet powerful metaphors, he presents the Lord as saying to the repentant: “Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely; yea, come unto me and bring forth works of righteousness, and ye shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire. . . . 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” (Alma 5:34–35, 38). These become controlling metaphors to the end of the sermon, with the metaphor of the shepherd amplified and exemplified:

For what shepherd is there among you having many sheep doth not watch over them, that the wolves enter not and devour his flock? And behold, if a wolf enter his flock doth he not drive him out? Yea, and at the last, if he can, he will destroy him. And now I say unto you that the good shepherd doth call after you; and if you will hearken unto his voice he will bring you into his fold, and ye are his sheep; and he commandeth you that ye suffer no ravenous wolf to enter among you, that ye may not be destroyed.
(Alma 5:59–60)

After the initial amplification of the central metaphors, Alma presents a strong and moving claim to authority. He declares that he speaks in the energy of his soul, he is called to speak after this manner, he is commanded to stand and testify, and he knows the things he has spoken are true because they were revealed to him by the Spirit of God (Alma 5:43–48). In a message frequently personalized by reference to “you,” Alma also amplifies his audience from “my beloved brethren” to everyone in the land—from “you the aged, and also the middle aged, and the rising generation” to “all ye ends of the earth” (Alma 5:49–50). The effect is the one achieved in essentially every Book of Mormon sermon—an immediate application to the modern-day reader.

Then quoting the highest authority (“thus saith the Spirit” [Alma 5:50]), Alma repeats in an intensified way the appeals he had used earlier: He asks soul-probing questions such as, “Will you persist in turning your backs upon the poor, and the needy, and in withholding your substance from them?” (Alma 5:55). He gives his words vividness and immediacy with extensive comparisons involving the ax, tree, fruit, fire, clothing, sheep, and shepherd. These are used to develop both threats and promises. On the one hand, “the ax is laid at the root of the tree; therefore every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire” (Alma 5:52). On the other hand, Alma says that “the good shepherd doth call after you; and if you will hearken unto his voice he will bring you into his fold” (Alma 5:60). And he ends with both a stern directive and a tender invitation: “And now I, Alma, do command you in the language of him who hath commanded me, that ye observe to do the words which I have spoken unto you. I speak by way of command unto you that belong to the church; and unto those who do not belong to the church I speak by way of invitation, saying: Come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life” (Alma 5:61–62).

The effect of the sermon is reported later to the people in Gideon: God has given Alma great joy in knowing that his brethren at Zarahemla are “established again in the way of his righteousness” (Alma 7:4).

Sermon at Gideon

The address Alma gives to the righteous people of Gideon—the city named after a martyred hero—is strikingly different from the one he gave to the worldly people of Zarahemla. It is a low-key, loving, and sensitive sermon, with each of the four main sections beginning “my beloved brethren.”

The structure is effective in its simplicity. Alma begins with his hope and expectation that he will find the Gideonites faithful and not “in the awful dilemma that our brethren were in at Zarahemla” (Alma 7:3). The key word in his expression is *trust*, spoken five times in such phrases as, “I trust that ye are not lifted up in the pride of your hearts” (Alma 7:6). Better than hope, trust emphasizes the confidence Alma has in this expectation.

The central message, to be given to all the Nephites, is of repentance and belief in the Son of God, who will “take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people” (Alma 7:11–12). Alma’s desire is similar to King Benjamin’s (whom Alma quotes): to stir his people to make a binding covenant with the Lord. “Show unto your God that ye are willing to repent of your sins,” Alma urges, “and enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments, and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of baptism” (Alma 7:15). The person who does “shall have eternal life” (Alma 7:16).

This prompting is followed by the question, “And now my beloved brethren, do you believe these things?”—to which Alma immediately responds, “Behold, I say unto you, yea, I know that ye believe them; and the way that I know that ye believe them is by the manifestation of the Spirit which is in me” (Alma 7:17). The subsequent repeated key word is *perceive*, as in “I perceive that ye are in the path which leads to the kingdom of God” (Alma 7:19). It is the perfect word here, for the literal meaning of *perceive* is “to take in thoroughly.”

Then follows a statement of the applicability of Alma’s message to the Gideonites: “And now my beloved brethren, I have said these things unto you that I might awaken you to a sense of your duty to God, that ye may walk blameless before him, that ye may walk after the holy order of God, after which ye have been received” (Alma 7:22). Unlike the people of Zarahemla who unless they repented had, figuratively, “garments stained with blood and all manner of filthiness” (Alma 5:22), the people of Gideon receive Alma’s prayer that the Lord may keep their garments spotless (Alma 7:25).

After further words of encouragement and counsel, Alma closes with a warm expression of his joy and a tender benediction: “My soul doth exceedingly rejoice, because of the exceeding diligence and heed which ye have given unto my word. And now, may the peace of God rest upon you, and upon your houses and lands, and upon your flocks and herds, and all that you possess, your women and your children, according to your faith and good works, from this time forth and forever” (Alma 7:26–27). If Alma were counseling us today, he would undoubtedly urge us to give similar “diligence and heed” to the words of the Book of Mormon.

First Sermon at Ammonihah

The third in this series of sermons by the head of the church and the former judge over all the land is to the people of Ammonihah. Unlike the people of Zarahemla or Gideon, the people of Ammonihah reject Alma’s exhortations and remain unregenerate. As with the sermon to the people of Zarahemla, Alma emphasizes deliverance, this time reflecting on how God brought Lehi and his family out of Jerusalem. Yet Alma declares that the people of Ammonihah are in danger of being cut off and destroyed.

Rather than calling them his “beloved brethren” (Alma 7:1), he designates these people a “wicked and perverse generation” (Alma 9:8). Implicitly, he seems to have little hope for reform but desires, if at all possible, to shake them into awareness and action. Alma then details blessings the people are not acknowledging, bracketing their ingratitude with warnings of their destruction by the Lamanites—who are morally better off than the people of Ammonihah. The core of the sermon builds with Alma’s repetition of the past participle (italicized below) to emphasize the weight of God’s blessings in the past. By implication, that emphasis also marks the absence of blessings in the present because of the people’s unrighteousness. The Lord

would rather suffer that the Lamanites might destroy all his people who are called the people of Nephi, if it were possible that they could fall into sins and transgressions, after *having had* so much light and so much knowledge given unto them of the Lord their God; yea, after *having been* such a highly favored people of the Lord; yea, after *having been favored* above every other nation, kindred, tongue, or people; . . . *having been visited* by the Spirit of God; *having conversed* with angels, and *having been spoken unto* by the voice of the Lord; and *having* the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and also many gifts, the gift of speaking with tongues, and the gift of preaching, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the gift of translation; yea, and after *having been delivered* of God out of the land of Jerusalem, by the hand of the Lord; *having been saved* from famine, and from sickness, and all manner of diseases of every kind; and they *having waxed* strong in battle, that they might not be destroyed; *having been brought* out of bondage time after time, and *having been kept* and *preserved* until now; and they have *been prospered* until they are rich in all manner of things—And now behold I say unto you, that if this people, who have received so many blessings from the hand of the Lord, should transgress contrary to the light and knowledge which they do have, I say unto you that if this be the case, that if they should fall into transgression, it would be far more tolerable for the Lamanites than for them. (Alma 9:19–23).

Alma’s closing plea lapses into resignation as his words fail to move the people of Ammonihah away from their path of self-destruction: “And now, my beloved brethren, for ye are my brethren, and ye ought to be beloved, and ye ought to bring forth works which are meet for repentance, seeing that your hearts have been grossly hardened against the word of God, and seeing that ye are a lost and a fallen people” (Alma 9:30).

Given the people’s earlier reactions and Alma’s resignation about their fate, it is no surprise that the people of Ammonihah become angry and attempt to cast Alma into prison. From the first, these people deny and mock Alma’s claims to authority. At the beginning of his attempted ministry to them, they revile him, saying that while he was high priest over the church, they did not acknowledge him, and that since he has delivered up the judgment seat to another, he has no authority over them. As he begins to preach to them, they challenge him with cries such as, “Who art thou? Suppose ye that we shall believe the testimony of one man, although he should preach unto us that the earth should pass away? . . . Who is God, that sendeth no more authority than one man among this people, to declare unto them the truth of such great and marvelous things?” (Alma 9:2, 6) Finally, to Alma’s claim that his words are those of an angel (Alma 9:29), they respond with angry violence (Alma 9:32). We see here the limit of a sermon, no matter how powerful. The only message that has any effect on the leaders of the people of Ammonihah is the collapse of the prison walls upon them (Alma 14:27).

Second Sermon at Ammonihah

In Alma 12 and 13, Alma establishes the words of Amulek, his missionary companion, and explains “things beyond” in an impromptu sermon that leads some people of Ammonihah to repentance and baptism and others to

vilification and murder.²⁷ This sermon is striking in respect to the multiple audiences it addresses. Further, it develops important meanings around the words *order*, *ordain*, and *ordinance*.

Amulek has just contended with Zeezrom, an expert lawyer, who is caught in his “lying and deceiving to destroy” Amulek (Alma 12:1). Alma steps forth and speaks to Zeezrom, his first audience, in words that are “heard by the people round about; for the multitude was great” (Alma 12:2). Two groups emerge in this multitude. The first group, after Alma’s sermon, “did believe on his words, and began to repent, and to search the scriptures” (Alma 14:1). The “more part of them,” however, “were desirous that they might destroy Alma and Amulek; for they were angry with Alma, because of the plainness of his words unto Zeezrom” (Alma 14:2). A fourth audience—whom we can imagine standing at the head of the group of people who desire to destroy Alma and Amulek—is Antionah, “a chief ruler among them” (Alma 12:20).

Alma first shows Zeezrom that his plan comes from the devil. A humbled and shaken Zeezrom then inquires diligently to know about the resurrection and the plan of redemption. Alma teaches him about this plan, emphasizing the need to soften one’s heart and repent. Though Zeezrom is now receptive to Alma’s teachings, Antionah, a chief judge, tries to trap Alma with a question about death and immortality. Alma responds brilliantly, but he does so not as much to persuade Antionah as to reach the multitude listening attentively (especially, we can imagine, because Antionah is clearly a learned adversary to Alma and represents the rulers of the people). Expounding more thoroughly the plan of salvation, Alma addresses his audience in the plural, speaking of them as his brethren and pleading with them, “And now, my brethren, seeing we know these things, and they are true, let us repent, and harden not our hearts” (Alma 12:37).

After that appeal and challenge, Alma expounds on the Melchizedek Priesthood. He emphasizes the righteousness of the high priests who chose good rather than evil, exercised great faith, and did good works, “they choosing to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish” and consequently being sanctified by the Holy Ghost and entering “into the rest of the Lord their God” (Alma 13:10, 12). He ends by affirming the God-directed authority of his message: “Now is the time to repent, for the day of salvation draweth nigh; yea, and the voice of the Lord, by the mouth of angels, doth declare it unto all nations” (Alma 13:21–22). Three more times he speaks of the “glad tidings” declared by angels and ends with an appeal, “from the inmost part of [his] heart,” that his brethren humble themselves, have faith, and repent, “having the love of God always in [their] hearts, that [they] may be lifted up at the last day and enter into his rest” (Alma 13:27, 29).

Some of the people believe Alma’s impassioned sermon, but most join in binding Alma and Amulek with cords and taking them before the chief judge to be accused of reviling against the law and the lawyers and judges. Subsequently, the people, under the leadership of judges like Antionah, cast out the believing men and put their wives and children to death by fire. Then they imprison Alma and Amulek and threaten to put them to death, only to have the prison collapse upon themselves. The climax of the scene is described this way:

And Alma cried, saying: How long shall we suffer these great afflictions, O Lord? O Lord, give us strength according to our faith which is in Christ, even unto deliverance. And they broke the cords with which they were bound; and when the people saw this, they began to flee, for the fear of destruction had come upon them.

And it came to pass that so great was their fear that they fell to the earth, and did not obtain the outer door of the prison; and the earth shook mightily, and the walls of the prison were rent in twain, so that

they fell to the earth; and the chief judge, and the lawyers, and priests, and teachers, who smote upon Alma and Amulek, were slain by the fall thereof. (Alma 14:26–27)

In the conflict with Zeezrom and then with Antionah, Alma asserts his authority: he holds the higher priesthood and has received his message from God by the mouths of angels. He is opposed by the lawyers “learned in all the arts and cunning of the people” (Alma 10:15). The corrupt lawyers and judges are eager to accuse and punish Alma and Amulek for reviling against their law (Alma 14:2–5). They are, however, exposed by this Book of Mormon narrative to be false and corrupt.

Alma’s teachings about the Melchizedek Priesthood are in part a response to this unjust exercise of authority. The Lord God, Alma says, “ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son” (Alma 13:1). This order is implicitly set against the unrighteous dominion of the lawyers and judges.

The word *order* appears fourteen times in Alma’s teachings about the priesthood in Alma 13; forms of *ordain* appear seven times; and *ordinance* or *ordinances* appears three times. The English words *order*, *ordain*, and *ordinances* all stem from the same root: Latin *ordo*, which means literally a straight row or regular series. To ordain originally meant “to put in order” and still has the force of that meaning. Having put the church in order elsewhere (Alma 5–8), Alma here teaches the principles of order according to God’s economy. Those holding the Melchizedek Priesthood, Alma says, “were ordained after this manner—being called with a holy calling, and ordained with a holy ordinance, and taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order, which calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end” (Alma 13:8). From this order comes redemption, sanctification, and the rest of the Lord.

Conversely, those who harden their hearts (*harden* appears eight times in Alma’s sermon) experience the opposite of order. They are “taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction,” and, the Lord swears in his wrath, they “shall not enter into my rest” but shall be condemned to the “everlasting destruction” of their souls (Alma 12:11, 35, 36).

The chief judge who opposes the holy order of the Son of God belongs to a radically different kind of order—“the order and faith of Nehor, who slew Gideon” (Alma 14:16). Chief among those who have hardened their hearts against the gospel taught by Alma and Amulek, he experiences a physical destruction that typifies the spiritual destruction Alma has been teaching about. In the collapse of the prison, “nature and history conform to the will of one God, and each forms the counterpart and complement of the other.”²⁸ Alma had taught that the consequence of evildoing was everlasting destruction and captivity, that at the bar of God those who have done wickedly would “fain be glad if [they] could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon [them] to hide [them] from his presence” (Alma 12:14). At the climax of their wickedness, the persecutors of Alma and Amulek do have rocks—the broken walls of the prison—fall on them, bringing them to physical destruction and implicitly marking their spiritual destruction as well.

There is one more audience to be accounted for: Zeezrom. In Alma 15 we learn that he is “scorched with a burning heat” as his once-hardened mind is harrowed up (Alma 15:3). Calling on the priesthood power of Alma and Amulek, Zeezrom is healed of his burning fever as he believes “in the power of Christ unto salvation” (Alma 15:6). Subsequently, Zeezrom is baptized and begins “from that time forth to preach unto the people” (Alma 15:12).

Alma’s sermon thus brings blessings to those who believe it and cursings to those who do not. In this regard, it is like the Book of Mormon as a whole. Speaking of the Lehiite record as well as other scriptures, the Lord through

Nephi says: “Out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world, every man according to their works, according to that which is written” (2 Nephi 29:11). When the children of God have the truth as found in the scriptures, they can accept it and act on it or reject it. Those “who live without God in the world” shall, at the last judgment, “quake, and tremble, and shrink beneath the glance of his all-searching eye” (Mosiah 27:31).

As a type of this, what could be called Amulek’s “all-searching eye” reveals “the thoughts and intents of [Zeezrom’s] heart” (Alma 12:7). And when Alma portrays Satan’s intent to chain Zeezrom “down to everlasting destruction,” Zeezrom begins “to tremble more exceedingly” (Alma 12:6–7). On the other hand, Antionah is one of those whose words and works condemn them to destruction (Alma 12:14). A judge himself, in teaching about judgment Alma repeatedly sets forth alternatives: Give heed and diligence to the word and eventually know the mysteries of God; or harden your heart and be taken captive by the devil (Alma 12:9–11). Believe, repent, and be saved; or die in your sins and then die a spiritual death (Alma 12:15–17). Do not provoke the Lord to “pull down his wrath”; but rather, “enter into the rest of God” (Alma 12:37). Repent and have the “love of God always in your hearts, that ye may be lifted up at the last day”; or “be bound down by the chains of hell” (Alma 13:29–30).

Words of King Anti-Nephi-Lehi

As with his brother, Lamoni, and his father, the king of all the Lamanites, King Anti-Nephi-Lehi has gained through Ammon and his brothers an understanding of the true nature of God and his relationship to man (see the dialogue between Aaron and Lamoni’s father in Alma 22). This understanding accounts for the king’s repeated references to his great God. These references are effectively developed in King Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s speech to his people through the rhetorical figure of climax, the ladderlike building up of elements:

I thank my God, my beloved people, that our great God has in goodness sent these our brethren, the Nephites, unto us to preach unto us, and to convince us of the traditions of our wicked fathers.

And behold, I thank my great God that he has given us a portion of his Spirit to soften our hearts, that we have opened a correspondence with these brethren, the Nephites.

And behold, I also thank my God, that by opening this correspondence we have been convinced of our sins, and of the many murders which we have committed.

And I also thank my God, yea, my great God, that he hath granted unto us that we might repent of these things, and also that he hath forgiven us of those our many sins and murders which we have committed, and taken away the guilt from our hearts, through the merits of his Son. (Alma 24:7–10)

In this passage we immediately note the repeated expressions of gratitude toward God, and we see the force of “my God” and “great God” in the first sentence becoming “my great God” in the second, moving again from “my God” in the third sentence to an intensified “my God, yea, my great God” in the fourth. Likewise, there is a progression from the preaching to its immediate effect, a softening of hearts, to its more important effect, being convinced of sins, to its greatest effect, forgiveness following repentance.

The rest of Anti-Nephi-Lehi’s brief exhortation builds through a series of compelling paradoxes and wordplay to a call to pacifism. Because God has taken away our *stains* of sin, he argues, “and our swords have become bright, then let us *stain* our swords no more with the blood of our brethren” (Alma 24:11–12). For perhaps, he goes on, “if we should stain our swords again they can no more be *washed bright through the blood* of the Son of our great God, which shall be shed for the atonement of our sins” (Alma 24:13). Symbolically, the blood of Christ has removed the blood from their swords, thus cleansing the repentant Lamanites. By fully accepting Christ’s shedding his blood for them, they no longer will shed the blood of their brethren. The token of that pledge, the king proposes, is to bury

their swords deep in the earth as a testimony at the last day that they have never used them. The people make this covenant with God by assembling “all the weapons which were used for the shedding of man’s blood” and burying them deep in the earth (Alma 24:17). The figurative power of the sermon finds completion in symbolic action by a converted people.

Alma’s Sermon to the Zoramites

Alma’s stirring sermon to the poor of the Zoramites on the topic of faith occurs in the middle of one long chapter in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, most of which might be called the Zoramite unit (chapters 31–35 in the 1981 edition). In this context, we are first shown the antichrist Korihor, who preached his own sermons on disbelief in Christ and on hedonism: “whatsoever a man did was no crime” (Alma 30:17). Although the continuity from Korihor to the Zoramites initially seems tenuous (Korihor is killed by a Zoramite), a much tighter connection is observable below the surface. Mormon dismisses Korihor by saying, “And thus we see the end of him who *perverteth the ways of the Lord*”; in the next sentence, he writes that after the end of Korihor, Alma “received tidings that the Zoramites were *perverting the ways of the Lord*” (Alma 30:60, 31:1). In their behavior and creed, the Zoramites reflect point for point the anti-Christian religion of Korihor. Like him, they say there shall be no Christ, they are materialists, and they speak of foolish traditions of the Nephites. Their proud form-prayer is contrasted by the sincere and humble prayer of Alma, which brings results “because he prayed in faith” (Alma 31:38).

In brief, here are the contrasts between the two types of prayer (from Alma 31:15–35):²⁹

Zoramites’ prayer

Alma’s prayer

Proud (on Rameumptum)	Humble (pleads for power and wisdom)
Exalt themselves	Confesses his infirmities
Say the elect (i.e., the Zoramites) shall be saved	Sorrow regarding wickedness of Zoramites
Seemingly exult that others will be damned to hell	Says Zoramite “souls are precious”
Call themselves a chosen and holy people	Recognizes the Zoramites’ wickedness
Materialists: love gold and silver, wear costly apparel	Opposed to materialism; calls it to the Lord’s attention
Lift up their hearts unto great boasting	Lifts up his voice to heaven

Immediately after the reference in the narrative to his prayer of faith, Alma is led to preach to the people about faith. Following this sermon, Amulek rises to reiterate Alma’s main points and to amplify his teachings on the atonement of Christ. Thus the Korihor-Zoramite disbelief in Christ is answered by the Alma-Amulek witness of Christ. This Zoramite unit ends with a narrative of the outcome: although many of the Zoramites, especially the poor, were brought to repentance, “the more popular part of the Zoramites” (Alma 35:3)—that is, their rulers and teachers—identified believers and then cast them out. Ironically, the charity of the people of Ammon in receiving these cast-out Zoramites stirs the Zoramite leaders to so much anger that they incite the Lamanites to prepare for war against the Nephites.

Alma’s sermon is interactive. While speaking to the people on the hill Onidah, he is approached by a multitude of poor people whose spokesman asks how they can worship God, because they have been cast out of their synagogues on account of their “exceeding poverty” (Alma 32:5). Alma immediately turns around, finds “that their afflictions had truly humbled them, and that they were in a preparation to hear the word” (Alma 32:6). Speaking no more to the other multitude, he begins his masterful sermon.

Alma's text is the people themselves: "I behold that ye are lowly in heart. . . . It is well that ye are cast out of your synagogues, that ye may be humble, and that ye may learn wisdom" (Alma 32:8, 12). The logical structure of his argument is cause and effect: (1) Their coarse apparel caused the poor Zoramites to be cast out of the synagogues they had helped build. (2) That expulsion leads to their being outside at the hill Onidah, feeling that they have no place to worship. (3) Because the poor Zoramites are thus humbled, they are prepared to hear the word. (4) Hearing the word can lead them to salvation. Alma puts it this way: "And now, because ye are compelled to be humble blessed are ye; for a man sometimes, if he is compelled to be humble, seeketh repentance; and now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy; and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end the same shall be saved" (Alma 32:13).

As in his previous sermons, Alma speaks out of the depths of his own experience. His series of sermons is bracketed by the account in Mosiah 27 of his own dramatic conversion and his retelling of that conversion in Alma 36 to his son Helaman. Alma knows from personal experience what apostasy is like; he knows how important it is to acknowledge the relationship of God with the fathers (compare Alma 9:9–22; 36:28–29); and here, in his appeal to persons compelled to be humble, he recognizes the preferred condition of being humbled without compulsion. Likewise, he knows from his own experience the risk of witnessing a sign from heaven as well as the more secure position of having only faith—to "hope for things which are not seen, which are true" (Alma 32:21). Finally, he employs figurative language from his conversion experience of having tasted "of the exceeding joy of which I did taste" (Alma 36:24). Alma had earlier appealed to the people of Zarahemla to accept the Lord's invitation to partake of the fruit of the tree of life (Alma 5:34). Now to the humble Zoramites, Alma shows the process by which the fruit can be nourished and obtained.

Indeed, Alma's sermon appeals directly to the people's agricultural experiences. Choosing the natural metaphor that compares his word to a seed, Alma leads the people step by step through the process of faith.

If ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me. (Alma 32:28)

The progression continues from swelling to sprouting to growing rapidly. With nourishing, the plant puts down roots and grows up to bring forth fruit. Neglect of the tree (lack of nourishing by faith), on the other hand, keeps it from getting roots, "and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out" (Alma 32:38). But if you nourish the word by faith with great diligence, Alma says, "it shall take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life" (Alma 32:41). The reward comes in plucking the fruit of the tree of life,

which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst. (Alma 32:42)

After this poetic and persuasive close to Alma's sermon, his auditors ask what they should believe and how they should plant the seed he has spoken of. Alma's response is to give them three main categories of means of belief as presented by three ancient prophet-witnesses: The first is prayer, as recalled by the poetic words of Zenos—whose main point is that one can pray anywhere and be heard (Alma 33:3–11). Second is the scriptures, as

evidenced by the prophet Zenock's teaching found in the brass plates that witness to the truth of the teachings of Zenos (Alma 33:15–16). Third is the testimony of Jesus found in types, specifically here the brazen serpent that Moses raised in the wilderness as a type of Christ (Alma 33:19–22).

Alma desires the poor Zoramites to be like the believing Israelites who looked on the brazen serpent, to have faith in the word—which is simultaneously Christ, the truth of Christ, and faith in Christ. Alma sums up the first half of his sermon: “I desire that ye shall plant this word in your hearts, and as it beginneth to swell even so nourish it by your faith. And behold, it will become a tree, springing up in you unto everlasting life. And then may God grant unto you that your burdens may be light, through the joy of his Son. And even all this can ye do if ye will” (Alma 33:23).

The result of Alma's sermon is spelled out after the record of Amulek's testimony: many of the poor of the Zoramites are brought to repentance, but the rulers and the priests “[find] out privily the minds of all the people” (Alma 35:5) concerning Alma's and Amulek's teachings and then cast the believers out of the land.

Jesus' Sermon on Israel

The resurrected Jesus' actions and words described in 3 Nephi 20 through 23 are the culmination of teachings about covenants in the Book of Mormon. Participating in the miraculously provided sacrament, the people renew their baptismal covenants and are filled with the Spirit. Then they are prepared for the greatest sermon ever given on covenants, one that binds together the covenantal relationship of the Lord with the three-part audience of the Book of Mormon—the Lamanites, the Gentiles, and the Jews.

Jesus' sermon integrates Isaiah's teachings on covenants with the Savior and his covenantal relationship. It bears a powerful witness through Isaiah that Jesus Christ is the God with whom ancient Israel made covenants. A complex sermon, it works through a subtle relationship between Isaiah's and Micah's sayings and the redemptive role of Jesus Christ.

The text, in effect, is the sacramental experience of the people. Jesus promises, “He that eateth this bread eateth of my body to his soul; and he that drinketh of this wine drinketh of my blood to his soul; and his soul shall never hunger nor thirst, but shall be filled” (3 Nephi 20:8). The people respond by giving “glory to Jesus, whom they both saw and heard” (3 Nephi 20:9). Because the members of Jesus' audience have been commanded to pray in their hearts, their giving glory to Jesus is a prayer of thanksgiving. In response, he speaks to them in what becomes a dialogue between God and man, an answer to the people's prayers.³⁰

The people are now prepared to be enlightened about the covenants they have made. This enlightenment, though, is not only for them, “a remnant of the house of Israel” (3 Nephi 20:10), but for all Israel as well as for the Gentiles, especially in the time of “the fulfilling of the covenant which the Father hath made unto his people” (3 Nephi 20:12).

Jesus opens up to both his immediate and his distant audience the meaning of the words of Isaiah at the time when they “should be fulfilled” (3 Nephi 20:11) and concludes by enjoining his people to “search these things diligently; for great are the words of Isaiah” (3 Nephi 23:1). He uses parallels, repetitions, and reversals as literary techniques on a large scale, just as Isaiah used those elements in the smaller units of his poetry.

Jesus also prophesies the gathering of the remnants of Israel. This is especially a spiritual gathering: they are “brought to the knowledge of the Lord their God” (3 Nephi 20:13). Then he prophesies that a curse will befall the Gentiles if they do not repent and that the people of Lehi will be blessed. He will fulfill “the covenant which [he] made with [their] father Jacob” in establishing these people in a New Jerusalem (3 Nephi 20:15–22).

Identifying himself as the prophet who is like Moses and affirming that all the prophets have testified of him, Jesus confirms that the blessing upon the children of Lehi fulfills the covenant with Abraham (3 Nephi 20:23–27). For their part, the Gentiles will be blessed, as will the Jews, who are to be gathered to the land of Jerusalem (3 Nephi 20:17–29). That will bring fulfillment of Isaiah’s poetic declaration: “Sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; for the Father hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem” (3 Nephi 20:34). In the last days, the Jews will acknowledge Jesus as their God, and then “shall this covenant which the Father hath covenanted with his people be fulfilled; and then shall Jerusalem be inhabited again with my people, and it shall be the land of their inheritance” (3 Nephi 20:46).

The emergence of the Book of Mormon is the sign of when these things will take place. It will be when the Gentiles learn about the Lamanites through the Book of Mormon and when the Book of Mormon is brought to the Lamanites from the Gentiles. Through this, “the covenant of the Father may be fulfilled which he hath covenanted with his people” (3 Nephi 21:4).

Earlier, Jesus quoted Isaiah regarding the marred servant (3 Nephi 20:43–44); now he affirms the marred servant will be healed (3 Nephi 21:10). This kind of repetition and reversal continues, knitting together the complex of prophecies from Micah and Isaiah: In the last days, Jews “shall believe in me, that I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (3 Nephi 20:31); conversely, those who do not believe in Jesus Christ “shall be cut off from among my people who are of the covenant” (3 Nephi 21:11). The first time the Savior speaks of Jacob as a lion, he emphasizes how his people are strengthened (3 Nephi 20:16–19); the second time, he stresses the effects on the lion’s adversaries, the unrepentant Gentiles. Except the Gentiles repent, he says, the “sword of [the Father’s] justice shall hang over them” (3 Nephi 20:20); but if they repent, then the Gentiles shall “come in unto the covenant and be numbered among this the remnant of Jacob” (3 Nephi 21:22).

Jesus promises that the gospel will be preached to the Lamanites, the lost ten tribes, and all the dispersed of his people, and then the work will commence in gathering people home to the lands of their inheritance. At the heart of this establishment of Zion in the last days is a reminder of the covenant made with Noah. Jesus quotes the words of the Lord through Isaiah: “For as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee. For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed” (3 Nephi 22:9–10).

In closing, Jesus gives the people a new understanding of familiar words of Old Testament prophets, especially of Isaiah. He admonishes all of Israel and the Gentiles to “give heed to [his] words” (3 Nephi 23:4) and ends with a reference to the baptismal covenant. Earlier, Jesus said to the Nephites: “And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God” (3 Nephi 11:33). He now concludes his sermon on covenants with the same simple counsel: “And whosoever will hearken unto my words and repenteth and is baptized, the same shall be saved” (3 Nephi 23:5).

Mormon’s Sermon

One of the most tightly woven and forceful sermons in the Book of Mormon is that recorded by Moroni as given by his father, Mormon, on faith, hope, and charity. The topic is particularly poignant in its context: Mormon has been killed by the Lamanites, and Moroni is the solitary survivor, recording these words out of his own generosity of spirit. We can also imagine that Moroni is rereading this sermon to strengthen his own faith, hope, and charity—a topic Moroni addresses in his concluding words in the Book of Mormon.

Mormon’s sermon is designed to strengthen and reconfirm the “peaceable followers of Christ” (Moroni 7:3), and it begins with a gracious but clear affirmation of Mormon’s authority—it is, Mormon says, because of the gift of the

Lord's calling that he is permitted to speak unto them. Then he wins the favorable attention of those followers by affirming that by their "peaceable walk with the children of men" he judges they have obtained a sufficient hope to "enter into the rest of the Lord" (Moroni 7:4, 3).

In speaking of his calling as a gift, Mormon establishes a thread that takes on significance as the sermon continues. His is a good gift; later he speaks of the impossibility of a hypocrite's offering a gift and having it acceptable to God: "Wherefore, a man being evil cannot do that which is good; neither will he give a good gift" (Moroni 7:6–10). On the other hand, "every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ" (Moroni 7:16). Then Mormon teaches about faith, hope, and charity, which are gifts of the Spirit. The metaphor of the gift is especially appropriate in a sermon about love presented in love: something precious is offered without compulsion, yet it will be efficacious only if accepted.

The sermon progresses in a simple yet subtle interlocking of parts. Mormon's initial discourse on works and their derivation from good or evil leads to analysis of principles on how to judge whether something is of Christ or of the devil. The counsel stemming from this knowledge is "See that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge ye shall also be judged" (Moroni 7:18). The earlier counsel, "If ye will lay hold upon every good thing, and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ," is turned into the leading question, "And now, my brethren, how is it possible that ye can lay hold upon every good thing?" (Moroni 7:19–20) This question leads to the presentation and analysis of the answer: faith. On a continuum from God to man, faith is created by ministrations of angels, by teachings of prophets, and by various other ways (Moroni 7:22–25). There is also a temporal progression in the exercise of faith from before the coming of Christ to the present, with an amplification of the missions of angels and prophets (Moroni 7:25–32). At this point, Mormon gives his interim conclusion: "And Christ hath said: If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me. And he hath said: Repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and have faith in me, that ye may be saved" (Moroni 7:33–34).

Mormon establishes the intimacy of his relationship with his audience by repeatedly speaking of them as "my beloved brethren" and then asks a conditional rhetorical question with a parenthetical testimony: "If this be the case that these things are true which I have spoken unto you, and God will show unto you, with power and great glory at the last day, that they are true, and if they are true has the day of miracles ceased?" (Moroni 7:35). His question, with related questions about the ministration of angels and the power of the Holy Ghost, relates back to the latter half of the preceding section on faith. His own answer to the question is "Nay; for it is by faith that miracles are wrought; . . . wherefore, if these things have ceased wo be unto the children of men, for it is because of unbelief, and all is vain" (Moroni 7:37). Linking faith with redemption, Mormon then confidently affirms, "I judge better things of you, for I judge that ye have faith in Christ because of your meekness" (Moroni 7:39).

This treatise on faith naturally leads to analysis of hope, a necessary result of faith. Mormon shows the root of faith to be hope; of hope, meekness; and of meekness, lowliness of heart (Moroni 7:42–43). If the latter two are lacking, then faith is vain. Put in the positive, if one is meek and lowly in heart and confesses that Jesus is the Christ, he must needs have charity, "for if he have not charity he is nothing" (Moroni 7:44). This declaration leads to a definition of charity comparable to the one in 1 Corinthians 13, with the summation being that "charity is the pure love of Christ, and . . . whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him" (Moroni 7:47).

In his conclusion, Mormon admonishes his "beloved brethren" to "pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as

he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure” (Moroni 7:48). Here he works backward, calling on his auditors to pray for love, which comes to those with faith in Jesus Christ, with the result that not just “ye” but “we” will have hope of being like him. Earlier in the sermon, Mormon showed how we can come unto Christ; at the end, he shows us how to become like him.

In all the sermons analyzed here, content is inextricably linked to form by such devices as parallelisms, rhetorical questions, and patterned arrangement of clauses or phrases.³¹ As we have seen, King Benjamin’s formal chiasmic approach to covenant making focuses his auditors’ attention on the central covenant implicit in the atonement of Christ. Alma’s progressive cause-and-effect structure in the sermon to the poor Zoramites naturally grows out of the circumstances and lends itself perfectly to his organic analogy. And Mormon’s interlocking of faith, hope, and charity shows relationships of these three elements and encourages the obtaining of all of them by the believer.

Notes

1. Although it is not examined in detail here, the resurrected Jesus’ initial sermon to the Nephites—which corresponds considerably to the Sermon on the Mount—has remarkable literary qualities. The rhetorical effectiveness of the Sermon on the Mount has been discussed by George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 39–63. The paradoxical nature of the Beatitudes is treated by Frank Kermode, “Matthew,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 391. Striking differences between the Sermon on the Mount and its equivalent in 3 Nephi, especially the pervasively Christ-centered pattern of the latter, have been pointed out by Krister Stendahl, “The Sermon on the Mount and Third Nephi,” in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaean-Christian Parallels*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, Utah: –54. Arthur R. Bassett shows the organic unity of this sermon in “Jesus’ Sermon to the Nephites,” in *The Book of Mormon: It Begins with a Family* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 204–13.

2. Additional important sermons in the Book of Mormon, or what Sidney B. Sperry more exactly calls “prophetic discourse,” are Nephi’s expounding the prophecies of Isaiah to his brethren (1 Nephi 22); Nephi’s prophetic declarations to his people (2 Nephi 25–33); Lehi’s exhortation found in 2 Nephi 1:1–4:11; Jacob’s sermon in Jacob 2–3; Jacob’s introducing and expounding the allegory of the olive tree (Jacob 5–6); Limhi’s oration (Mosiah 7:18–33); Abinadi’s exhortation and testimony (Mosiah 12–16); Alma’s sermon in Alma 12–13; Amulek’s story and testimony (Alma 10:17–23, Alma 34); religious dialogue between Ammon and King Lamoni (Alma 18); religious dialogue between Aaron and the king over all the land (Alma 22); dialogue of Ammon with his brethren (Alma 26); Alma’s blessings and instructions to his sons (Alma 36–42); the impromptu sermon by Nephi the son of Helaman (Helaman 7:13–29); Nephi’s speech renewed (Helaman 8:11–28); Samuel the Lamanite’s testimony (Helaman 13–15); sermons and teachings of the resurrected Christ (much of 3 Nephi 11–28); and Moroni’s final admonition to his future readers (Moroni 10).

Having in mind prophetic discourses such as those found in 2 Nephi 29 and Jacob 6, Sperry says in *Our Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1947), 117, “This type of literature is relatively simple and may be thought of as the equivalent of our modern sermon in which description, reflection, and warning are intermingled in a fervor of appeal.” As good examples of prophetic discourse in the Old Testament, he cites Isaiah 1–4, Jeremiah 23–32, and Ezekiel 34.

3. The Nephites would have seen a close connection between an earthly king and a heavenly king—they considered their kings to be appointed by God. Stephen D. Ricks points out this fact in “The Ideology of Kingship in

Mosiah 1–6,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS), 114–16.

4. In his essay “King, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6” (in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991], 209–19), Stephen Ricks shows how the elements of covenant renewal found in Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua are found in Mosiah 1–6: “(1) the king/prophet gives a preamble that introduces God as the one making the covenant or that introduces his prophet as spokesman for God; (2) the king/prophet gives a brief review of God’s relations with Israel in the past; (3) the king/prophet notes the terms of the covenant, listing specific commandments and obligations that God expected Israel to keep; (4) the people bear witness in formal statements that they accept the covenant; (5) the king/prophet lists the blessings and curses for obedience or disobedience to the covenant; and (6) the king/prophet makes provisions for depositing a written copy of the covenant in a safe and sacred place and for reading its contents to the people in the future” (215–16). See also Ricks’s earlier essay, “The Treaty/Covenant Pattern in King Benjamin’s Address (Mosiah 1–6),” *Brigham Young University Studies* 24, no. 2 (1984): 151–62.

5. Hugh Nibley in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 243–56 shows how this gathering was the Great Assembly at the New Year. Also, John A. Tvedtnes, Gordon C. Thomasson, and John W. Welch have noted how the setting of this speech is proximate to a celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. (Tvedtnes, “King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles,” in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990], 2:197–237; Thomasson, “Expanding Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Pre-exilic Israelite Religious Patterns” [unpublished]; Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, ed. John W. Welch [Hildesheim, West Germany: Gerstenberg, 1981], 202.)

6. George Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 123–24.

7. *Ibid.*, 127.

8. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 36.

9. *Ibid.*, 10.

10. *Ibid.*, 23–24.

11. *Ibid.*, 15.

12. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 123.

13. This is one of many elements that make, as Welch shows, Benjamin’s speech a classic ancient farewell address. (*Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 120–23.)

14. Radical Christian rhetoric, Kennedy says, is “a form of ‘sacred language’ characterized by assertion and absolute claims of authoritative truth without evidence or logical argument” (*New Testament Interpretation*, 104).

15. Many of these elements are also found in other Book of Mormon sermons. For example, *Authority*: Alma commands the people of Zarahemla “in the language of him who hath commanded me” (Alma 5:61). *Clear one’s*

conscience: Jacob desires to rid his garments of blood (Jacob 1:19, 2:2). *Speak plainly*: Alma says, “I have spoken unto you plainly that ye cannot err, or have spoken according to the commandments of God” (Alma 5:43). *Purpose of discourse given*: Alma asks the people of Zarahemla challenging questions that will stir them to repentance (Alma 5:8–59). *People enjoined to repent*: Abinadi’s exhortation (Mosiah 12–16). *Choice between following God and following Satan*: Jacob says, “Reconcile yourselves to the will of God, and not to the will of the devil and the flesh” (2 Nephi 10:24). *A prophecy given of the future*: Samuel the Lamanite’s prophecies (Helaman 13–15). *Prophet’s testimony to be confirmed*: Nephi says, “I speak unto you as the voice of one crying from the dust: Farewell until that great day shall come. . . . For what I seal on earth, shall be brought against you at the judgment bar” (2 Nephi 33:13, 15). *Audience response*: The poor of the Zoramites interact with Alma (Alma 32–33).

16. Welch, *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 203.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.* Also very instructive on chiasmus is Welch’s earlier essay on the topic: “Chiasmus in the Book of “*Brigham Young University Studies* 10, no. 1 (1969): 69–84.

19. Welch, *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 205.

20. John S. Tanner characterizes Jacob’s style and themes well in “Jacob and His Descendants as Authors” (*Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 52–66). Jacob is “intimate, vivid, vulnerable” (59).

21. Marilyn Arnold, in *Sweet Is the Word: Reflections on the Book of Mormon, Its Narrative, Teachings, and People* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant, 1996), 51, responds to “how effectively Jacob melds content and form, how what he says is enhanced by his use of language.” A brief but effective analysis of the sermon is provided by C. Terry Warner in his essay “Jacob,” in *The Book of Mormon: It Begins with a Family*, 47–48.

22. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 19. Kennedy refers to the three species of rhetoric formulated by Aristotle—judicial, deliberative, and epideictic—and says, “The species is judicial when the author is seeking to persuade the audience to make a judgment about events occurring in the past; it is deliberative when he seeks to persuade them to take some action in the future; it is epideictic when he seeks to persuade them to hold or reaffirm some point of view in the present.” More specifically, *epideictic* means “the praise or blame of a man” as defined by Kennedy in *Classical Rhetoric*, 73.

23. Welch, *Reexploring*, 66–68; see also Welch, “The Temple in the Book of Mormon,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 334–36.

24. This Book of Mormon sermon is exceptional in containing elements akin to the pattern of Puritan sermons: explication of biblical text, a derivation of doctrine from it, reasons for that doctrine, and uses of it. For the form of Puritan sermons, see Phyllis M. Jones and Nicholas R. Jones, eds., *Salvation in New England: Selections from the Sermons of the First Preachers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), 6; Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 332–33; or Kenneth R. Murdock, “The Colonial and Revolutionary Period,” in *The Literature of the American People*, ed. Arthur Hobson Quinn (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951), 43.

25. Welch aptly calls these “Jacob’s Ten Commandments,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 69–72. Welch says Jacob’s “statement is an admirable summary of the basic religious values of the Nephites, cast in a form fully at

home in ancient Israel and in the Near East" (72).

26. This concept of ridding garments of the blood (sins) of others is repeated by Jacob in Jacob 1:19 and pronounced by King Benjamin (who assembled his people in order to rid his garments of their blood [Mosiah 2:28]), by Alma (who asks his brethren how they will feel at the bar of God with their "garments stained with blood and all manner of filthiness" [Alma 5:22]), and by Mormon and Moroni—whose testimonies help them "rid [their] garments of the blood of [their] brethren" (Mormon 9:35; Ether 12:38).

27. For a chiasical and rhetorical approach to part of Alma 13, see James T. Duke, "The Literary and Doctrinal Significance of Alma 13:1–9," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5 (1996), 103–18.

28. This is a point Jacob Neusner, noted Jewish scholar, makes about Genesis in his book *Christian Faith and the Bible of Judaism: The Judaic Encounter with Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 20. It applies well to a number of situations in the Book of Mormon in which nature and history correlate with each other.

29. Steven L. Olsen, "Patterns of Prayer: Humility or Pride," *Ensign* 22 (August 1992): 10, says, "Mormon's entire account of the mission to the Zoramites teaches a powerful lesson on true worship, carefully drawn from the historical details of the records and woven around the poignant contrast between Alma's prayer and the prayers of the Zoramites."

30. Amos N. Wilder, in *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 43, finds three particular speech patterns in the oldest period of the Gospels: the dialogue, the story, and the poem. The dialogue-form, he says, "takes us to the heart of biblical religion, namely prayer itself" (45).

31. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric*, 25, says, "In all genuine artifacts, including language-forms, shape and substance are inseparable and mutually determinative." In my analyses of Book of Mormon sermons, I have been aided by a number of examinations of the New Testament as literature. Leland Ryken in *How to Read The Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academie Books, 1984), for example, discusses examples of rhetorical patterns found in the New Testament. These include parallelism, rhetorical questions, question-and-answer constructions, imaginary dialogues, the aphoristic conciseness of a proverb, and any highly patterned arrangement of clauses or phrases. Forceful and imaginative language in the New Testament, Ryken finds, uses rhetorical devices to break through the clichés of ordinary language and to reveal truth with power.