



# "BECAUSE THERE WAS NO DARKNESS"

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST: A BOOK OF MORMON PERSPECTIVE



*"Because There Was No Darkness"*

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A BOOK OF MORMON PERSPECTIVE



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## FOREWORD

The time just before Christ's birth was a dark period in history. In Judea, Rome had conquered and oppressed the Jews. They were looking for their Messiah to free them. In the Americas, the people waited for prophecies to be fulfilled, but those who didn't believe had decided that time was up. Anyone who did believe in a coming Messiah would be put to death. Fear hung heavy in the hearts of many.

Then Christ came. And when He came, a new star appeared as a sign of His light entering the world. In Judea, the angels rejoiced and the shepherds testified of the newborn Messiah. His was a miraculous birth.

But in the Americas, His birth had an even more miraculous effect. The very day the believers were slated to die, Christ came, and "at the going down of the sun there was no darkness" (3 Nephi 1:15). He brought that additional sign of light to the Nephites, and in so doing, saved the lives of many.

Think of that; Christ's first act on earth was saving the lives of those who believed in Him. His birth foreshadowed His ultimate mission to save mankind.

Christ truly is, as He taught the Nephites years later, "the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of the bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world" (3 Nephi 11:11). From His birth to His death and on to today, Christ has fulfilled prophecies and brought light and life to us, God's children.

Book of Mormon prophets prophesied of Christ's coming and His mission for centuries before He was born. His birth and life fulfilled many of those prophecies. At Book of Mormon Central, we've written KnoWhys about several of these prophecies of Christ's birth over the past several years. We've compiled them now into this new edition of *Because There Was No Darkness—The Birth of Christ: A Book of Mormon Perspective*.

We hope this collection of KnoWhys helps bring the light of Christ and understanding of His salvation into your life this holiday season. May we remember and experience His light and love this Christmas season!

Merry Christmas,  
Book of Mormon Central

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## HOW DID NEPHI READ ISAIAH AS A WITNESS OF CHRIST'S COMING?

*“Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign—Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”*

*2 Nephi 17:14*

### THE KNOW

The framework of Nephi’s prophetic vision (1 Nephi 11–14) informs his selection and interpretation of the Isaiah passages he quotes. In 1998 John W. Welch articulated a four-stage pattern in Nephi’s vision, which Welch dubbed “the Nephite prophetic view.”<sup>1</sup> The first stage in the pattern “begins with the prophet foretelling how and when Jesus would come down in the flesh,” and how he would perform miracles, and be crucified.<sup>2</sup>

Nephi’s vision of the Savior in 1 Nephi 11 is the clearest prophecy of the coming of the Savior on record. Perhaps no other prophet before Christ knew the Savior so well. Yet, Nephi says that Isaiah “verily saw my Redeemer, *even as I have seen him*” (2 Nephi 11:2). What in Isaiah’s writings might make Nephi feel that Isaiah had seen the Savior as clearly as he had?

One answer is in Isaiah’s prophetic call. The Book of Mormon opens with Lehi’s vision of “God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels” with a Messianic figure “descending out of the midst of heaven” (1



Nephi 1:8–9). Nephi’s vision of the Savior, at the top of a high mountain, also appears to have been before the throne of God and his divine assembly.<sup>3</sup>

Isaiah too had his vision of God on his throne (2 Nephi 16; Isaiah 6), which is quite comparable to Lehi’s, and which Nephi quotes.<sup>4</sup> In Isaiah’s call, one of the seraphim cleanses Isaiah to make him worthy to stand in the midst of the divine council (2 Nephi 16:6–7; Isaiah 6:6–7). Latter-day Saint biblical scholar David Bokovoy explained, “Though the literal identity of this fiery angelic being is ambiguous in the text, one possible LDS reading would interpret the seraph who cleanses Isaiah as an allusion to Christ.”<sup>5</sup> Bokovoy further commented:

Interpreting the Lord seated upon the throne as God the Father and the seraph who heals Isaiah as an allusion to Christ would allow the chapter to serve as an illustration of Isaiah’s role as an eyewitness of Jesus who, as Nephi observed in his commentary, had been sent to testify of the Redeemer.<sup>6</sup>

This reading suggests that, like Lehi and Nephi, Isaiah’s witness of the Redeemer came as part of a divine council vision. This, however, does not offer the same kinds of details found in Nephi’s vision.

In his vision, Nephi saw a “virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins . . . bearing a child in her arms” (1 Nephi 11:15, 20). Isaiah, too, saw that “a virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son” (2 Nephi 17:14; Isaiah 7:14).

Isaiah also rejoiced, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (2 Nephi 19:6; Isaiah 9:6). Among the titles of the Messianic child are “Everlasting Father” and “Mighty God.” In the original text of the Book of Mormon, Nephi’s guide says that the virgin’s child is “the Lamb of God, yea, even the Eternal Father” (1 Nephi 11:21), and the “everlasting God” (1 Nephi 11:32).<sup>7</sup>

Nephi “beheld that he went forth ministering unto the people, in power and great glory” and yet, “They cast him out from among them” (1 Nephi 11:28). He was “taken by the people” and “judged of the world” (1 Nephi 11:32). Isaiah also spoke of the people rejecting the Lord, saying “this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah” (2 Nephi 18:6; Isaiah 8:6). For those who reject him, Isaiah said, the Lord is “a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (2 Nephi 18:14; Isaiah 8:14).

In his subsequent explanation or midrash in 2 Nephi 25, Nephi tied several of these points together, about the coming of Christ (25:11–12), the importance of his names (25:19), and the pain of his being rejected (25:13–14).

## THE WHY

The prophet Isaiah saw and knew the Lord. The most important role of any prophet is to testify of Jesus Christ and his atoning mission. Noting that the name “Isaiah” means “the Lord is salvation,” Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has testified: “Isaiah was prepared from birth—and of course we would say from before birth—to testify of the Messiah and bear such witness of the divinity of Christ’s coming.”<sup>8</sup>

Nephi saw the Lord as well. Connecting Messianic passages in the opening chapters of Isaiah with the key elements in Nephi’s vision of the Savior draws these two testimonies together. Nephi saw in Isaiah a kindred spirit—another who, like him, had received profound advanced knowledge of the Redeemer. Thanks to his detailed vision of the Savior’s birth, life, ministry, and rejection, Nephi was able to see allusions to Christ in Isaiah’s writings clearly.

Reading Isaiah using Nephi’s prophetic framework illuminates Isaiah’s witness of the Savior. By using this pattern in his vision to select and interpret Isaiah, Nephi helps readers to see how and why Nephi read Isaiah Christologically, all of which brings clarity to readers today.

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*Originally Published as KnoWhy #40, "How Did Nephi Read Isaiah as a Witness of Christ's Coming?" on February 24, 2016.*





## WHY DID SAMUEL MAKE SUCH CHRONOLOGICALLY PRECISE PROPHECIES?

*“Behold, I, Samuel, a Lamanite, do speak the words of the Lord which he doth put into my heart; and behold he hath put it into my heart to say unto this people that the sword of justice hangeth over this people; and four hundred years pass not away save the sword of justice falleth upon this people.”*

*Helaman 13:5*

### THE KNOW

During his extended address to the Nephites in Zarahemla, Samuel the Lamanite made two remarkably specific prophetic utterances. First, he declared, “four hundred years pass not away save the sword of justice falleth upon this people” (Helaman 13:5; cf. v. 9; Alma 45:10). Later, he said, “Behold, I give unto you a sign; for five years more cometh, and behold, then cometh the Son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name” (Helaman 14:2).

Such precise prophetic predictions are rare in scripture.<sup>1</sup> Even within Samuel’s own discourse, there is another prophecy—the sign of Christ’s death—where the exact timing is not mentioned (see Helaman 14:14, 20–27).<sup>2</sup> It seems likely that when the exact timing is included in the record, the timing itself was somehow significant.

All ancient societies had important calendar units or time periods that were carefully marked.<sup>3</sup> LDS Mesoamericanist John E. Clark noted, “The major cycle

of Maya time was a four-hundred-year period called a *baktun*.<sup>4</sup> Each *baktun* was broken down into 20 units called a *katun*, a 20-year cycle, and the *katun* was subdivided into units called a *hotun*, which was a five-year cycle.<sup>5</sup> According to John L. Sorenson, “Omens and prophecies . . . among the Maya were commonly phrased in terms of the beginning or ending of whole calendar units.”<sup>6</sup>

In this light, it is significant that both of Samuel the Lamanite’s time-specific prophecies correlate to the specific units of measurement within the Mesoamerican calendrical system.<sup>7</sup> As Clark put it, “Samuel the Lamanite warned the Nephites that one *baktun* ‘shall not pass away before . . . they [would] be smitten’ (Helaman 13:9).”<sup>8</sup>

Another LDS Mesoamericanist, Mark Wright, suggested, “Samuel the Lamanite may have been making a *hotun* prophecy when he stated that in ‘five years’ signs would be given concerning the birth of Christ (Helaman 14:2).”<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, according to Sorenson, “In Yucatan at the time of the Spanish conquest, the ruler or his spokesman . . . had the duty to prophesy five years in advance what fate the next twenty-year *katun* would bring.”<sup>10</sup> In similar fashion, Samuel the Lamanite prophesied the fate of the next *baktun* (Helaman 13:5, 9), and apparently did so five years in advance (Helaman 14:2).<sup>11</sup>

## THE WHY

Mesoamerican anthropologist Prudence M. Rice explained, “Time is a cultural construct. Its units of measurement, meaning, and so on are unique in terms of legitimizing power and authority.”<sup>12</sup> It is therefore highly significant that Samuel the Lamanite’s chronologically precise prophecies each used time periods that were likely important within the broader cultural context of the Nephites. The use of these culturally important time periods likely served to legitimize Samuel’s prophetic authority and credibility.

As Sorenson observed, “In Mesoamerican thinking, Alma’s and Samuel’s prophecies for an entire *baktun* would have been exceedingly profound statements.”<sup>13</sup> Another Latter-day Saint Mesoamerican expert agreed: “Samuel’s prophecy included such a powerfully evocative number that the people would doubtless have considered the entire prophecy highly symbolic.”<sup>14</sup>

According to Wright,<sup>15</sup> part of that symbolism would have made the prophetic utterance relevant for Samuel’s contemporary Nephite audience. Mesoamerican views of time were cyclical—meaning they expected certain events to repeat themselves over the course of each *katun* or *baktun*.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, a prophecy of destruction in 400 years—in one *baktun*—could also be considered a warning of destruction in the here and now.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Samuel

warned that at that very moment, “the sword of justice hangeth over this people,” that “the anger of the Lord is *already* kindled against you,” and that the only way out was repentance followed by continuing faith in Jesus Christ (Helaman 13:5–6, 30).<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, the *hotun* was a period commonly celebrated and commemorated, as was the *katun*.<sup>19</sup> Samuel’s prophecy warned the people in advanced that the next *hotun* would truly be a cause to celebrate—it would mark the birth of the Lord and Savior into the world. Mormon recorded that the coming of the sign did indeed bring “glad tidings unto the people” (3 Nephi 1:26). The occasion was no doubt honored and celebrated for *hotuns* and *katuns* to come, not only as marking the birth of Christ but also in commemoration of the miraculous timing of the sign—coming, as it did, just in time to spare the believers from being executed (3 Nephi 1:8–16).

This background also potentially explains why a specific time frame for the sign of Christ’s death goes unmentioned in Samuel’s prophecy. It did not come at the completion of an important unit of time, as did the birth of Christ (a *hotun*) and the ultimate fall of the Nephites (a *baktun*). Mormon, it seems, mentioned the specific time frame of these events when it coincided with time cycles deemed important within the surrounding culture. The prophetic use of highly symbolic time periods in Book of Mormon prophecy appears to be an example of the Lord speaking “unto men according to their language, unto their understanding” (2 Nephi 31:3; cf. Doctrine and Covenants 1:24).<sup>20</sup>

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*Originally Published as KnowWhy #184, "Why Did Samuel Make Such Chronologically Precise Prophecies?" on September 9, 2016.*





## WHAT DOES THE VIRGIN MARY HAVE TO DO WITH THE TREE OF LIFE?

*“Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh.”*

*1 Nephi 11:18*

### THE KNOW

When Nephi asked the Spirit of Lord the meaning of the tree seen in his father’s dream (1 Nephi 11:11), the Spirit seemingly changed the subject, and called Nephi’s attention to “a virgin.” Nephi said that “she was exceedingly fair and white,” and “most beautiful and fair above all other virgins” (1 Nephi 11:13, 15).

As this vision proceeds, Nephi sees this woman “bearing a child in her arms” (1 Nephi 11:20), and the angel escorting him told Nephi that she is “the mother of God, after the manner of the flesh,” as found in the original text.<sup>1</sup> From this vision, Nephi somehow comes to understand the meaning of the tree of life (1 Nephi 11:21–22).

In 1998, Daniel C. Peterson noted a fundamental connection between the tree and virgin. The adjectives describing the virgin (“most beautiful,” “exceedingly fair,” “white”) compared to those describing the tree (“exceeding all beauty,” and “exceed[ing] the whiteness of the driven snow”), are synonyms (1 Nephi 11:8).

Just as the tree bore fruit, the virgin bore a child (1 Nephi 11:7, 20). “Clearly,” Peterson noted, “the glimpse given to Nephi of the virgin mother with her child



is the answer to his question about the meaning of the tree. Indeed, it is evident that, in some sense, *the virgin is the tree*.<sup>22</sup>

As Peterson goes on to explain, scholars have recently come to accept that in ancient Israelite religion, there was a belief in a divine mother goddess named Asherah, who was represented by the tree of life. The symbolism is widespread throughout the ancient Near East, and can be seen in association with different goddesses by various cultures.

In 2011, Egyptologist John S. Thompson went on to explore additional connections between different Egyptian goddesses and sacred trees. Thompson notes that while most ancient Near Eastern cultures sexualized the tree goddess, the Egyptians emphasized the motherly role, often depicting tree goddesses nursing a child.<sup>3</sup> The Israelite Asherah was likewise more focused on the nursing mother and less sexualized—she was the “mother of the gods” and also regarded as the mother of the Davidic kings.<sup>4</sup>

## THE WHY

Nothing is more important in Christian worship than to recognize Jesus Christ as the Son of God, born of a virgin, who became flesh as the express image of his Father (John 17:3; Hebrews 1:1–3). The Book of Mormon, as another witness and covenant of God, testifies “that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God” as he “manifest[s] himself unto all nations” (Book of Mormon Title Page). The ancient abridger Mormon testified that he had written this book “for the intent that ye may believe” the Bible, and so that modern people may know of the marvelous and miraculous works that have been brought to pass “by the power of God among them” (Mormon 7:9).

The notion of a divine mother goddess strongly resonates with Latter-day Saint belief in a Heavenly Mother.<sup>5</sup> While Mary is not to be identified as Heavenly Mother, the ancient Israelite and Egyptian cultural backgrounds shed light on Nephi’s vision and how he made sense of imagery.

Just as Israelite and Egyptian religions associated a sacred tree with a mother of gods and kings, so Nephi’s guide tied the idea of the tree of life together with the “mother of God, after the manner of the flesh,” whose child was the Messiah, the true Davidic King.

People everywhere can appreciate the beautiful force and effect of Nephi’s revelation. Samuel Zinner, a non-LDS scholar of Enoch studies, has remarked that the symbolism in Nephi’s vision, “implies a theological . . . continuity between the tree of life, Lady Jerusalem, Lady Nazareth, and the Virgin Mary. These are all ultimately specializations or refractions of Asherah.”<sup>6</sup> Margaret

Barker, another non-LDS Old Testament scholar, has marveled that Nephi's vision "is the Heavenly Mother, represented by the tree of life, and then Mary and her Son on earth. This revelation to Joseph Smith was the ancient Wisdom symbolism, intact, and almost certainly as it was known in 600 BCE."<sup>7</sup>

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## HOW DOES THE BOOK OF MORMON HELP DATE THE FIRST CHRISTMAS?

*“Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world”*

*3 Nephi 1:13*

### THE KNOW

On December 25, Latter-day Saints join with many other Christians around the world in celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind. Yet most scholars agree that the exact date of Christ’s birth is uncertain. Even Latter-day Saints and their General Authorities have expressed different views on the matter.<sup>1</sup>

Birthdates were not as important in the ancient world as they are today, and consequently the birthdays of most major figures in ancient history are unknown. It was not until the 2nd century that early Christians began to discuss the timing of Christ’s birth, and already by then there was disagreement.<sup>2</sup> Such disagreement continued even as the celebration of Christmas on December 25 began to be fixed in the late 3rd century AD,<sup>3</sup> and it wasn’t until the 6th century that a calendar was made attempting to calculate time based on the date of Christ’s birth.<sup>4</sup>

Given the lack of interest in Christ’s birth early on, and the uncertainty in later centuries, it is no wonder the question remains unsettled today. Scholars employ

a wide range of sources, including the Gospel accounts, ancient historical works, astronomy, and archaeology, when trying to address this question. The year 4 BC is considered the latest possible date because Herod the Great died in the spring of that year, meaning the Savior must have been born sometime before then (Matthew 2; Luke 1:5).<sup>5</sup>

An important factor to settling the timing of Christ's birth is determining the timing of His death in combination with the duration of his life.<sup>6</sup> While there remains some uncertainty, many scholars have concluded "that the first weekend of April AD 30 is the most likely time of the death of Jesus."<sup>7</sup>

Though scholars have scoured the gospel accounts for clues, nothing in the New Testament provides definitive answers as to the length of the Savior's life.<sup>8</sup> Latter-day Saints benefit from having another source on the duration of the Savior's life: the Book of Mormon.

Since the Nephites began counting their years from the time the sign of Christ's birth was given (3 Nephi 2:8), and since they recorded the exact day they received the sign of His death in their calendar (3 Nephi 8:5), the Book of Mormon provides a fairly precise duration of the Savior's life.<sup>9</sup> The sign of Christ's death came "in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day" (3 Nephi 8:5), so the Savior lived at least 33 years and 4 days by the Nephites count.

Yet there remains some ambiguity. First, it is not certain how the Nephites counted those 33 years. Did they start counting from the very day the sign was given or did they wait for the next new year's day? Did they count the year in which the sign was given as year one, or begin the year after? There also remain questions about the length of a Nephite "year" at that time, and whether they were solar years (~365 days), lunar years (~354 days), or the *tun* years (360 days) used in Mesoamerica.<sup>10</sup>

With these considerations in mind, LDS scholars Lincoln H. Blumell and Thomas A. Wayment have reasoned that the Book of Mormon "indicates Jesus lived between thirty-two and nearly thirty-four years."<sup>11</sup> Combining the Book of Mormon with additional evidence from archaeology, astronomy, history, and ancient Jewish and Mesoamerican calendars, various Latter-day Saint researchers—such as apostle Orson Pratt, researcher Randall Spackman, New Testament scholar Thomas Wayment, and archaeologist Jeffrey Chadwick—have reached different conclusions, ranging between spring in 5 BC to spring in 4 BC.<sup>12</sup>

## THE WHY

While the Book of Mormon does not provide definitive evidence on the dating Jesus Christ's birth, it does offer important additional information, especially

to scholars within the Latter-day Saint tradition. Specifically, it provides a limited range for the lifespan of Jesus which, once anchored to a solid death date, limits the possible time span within which the birth of Christ must have occurred. If the proposed date of April AD 30 for the death of Jesus is correct, then possible birthdates for Christ are limited to sometime in 5 BC or in the early months of 4 BC.

No doubt scholars in and out of the Church will continue to investigate and debate the timing of the Savior's birth. While exploring this question, Latter-day Saint scholars and lay persons alike should appreciate and cherish this added resource on the Savior's birth, life, death, and teachings. The Book of Mormon truly is another testament of Jesus Christ, bringing clarity and understanding to every aspect of the Savior's life and teachings.

LDS archaeologist Jeffrey R. Chadwick reflected this attitude when he wrote:

As a Latter-day Saint, I am not only duty-bound but personally grateful to accept and present data from the Book of Mormon, the genuine historical reliability of which I am both spiritually and materially convinced, to corroborate the evidence of the New Testament and the other avenues explored.<sup>13</sup>

In the end, knowing exactly when Jesus Christ was born is not as important as knowing that He lived and that He is the Savior of the world, that he was born as “the light and the life of the world” (3 Nephi 11:11).

The Book of Mormon is absolutely clear on the overriding reality that the Lord Jesus did in fact condescend to come and dwell as a mortal among mankind, and to suffer and die, bringing to pass the resurrection and immortality of all the sons and daughters of God. Just as the sign announcing his birth brought light and deliverance to the Nephites,<sup>14</sup> He will bring light and deliverance to all who come unto Him.

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## HOW WAS THERE A NIGHT WITHOUT DARKNESS?

*“For behold, at the going down of the sun there was no darkness; and the people began to be astonished because there was no darkness when the night came.”*

*3 Nephi 1:15*

### THE KNOW

When a Lamanite came into Zarahemla prophesying that there would be “great lights in heaven,” leading to a night with “no darkness . . . as if it was day,” and “many signs and wonders in heaven” (Helaman 14:2–6),<sup>1</sup> some Nephites were skeptical, and even hostile (Helaman 16:2).<sup>2</sup> In the next five years, both the skepticism and the hostility grew, and a date was set by which “all those who believed in those traditions should be put to death” if the sign failed to appear (3 Nephi 1:7, 9). Yet, as prophesied, “at the going down of the sun there was no darkness” and “it was as light as though it was mid-day” (vv. 15, 19).<sup>3</sup>

Today, this prophetic sign remains difficult for some to believe. How could there be a night without darkness? Exactly how God produced such a sign is impossible to know for certain, but there are natural astronomical and atmospheric events which may shed some light on this matter.

Hugh Nibley suggested to his students once that this sign could have been caused by a supernova, comparing it to one in AD 1054 which “could be seen all over the world” and “was almost as bright as the sun.”<sup>4</sup> Astronomers have



documented a supernova in the 11th century which, according to lead researcher Frank Winkler, provided enough light that “people could probably have read manuscripts at midnight by its light.”<sup>5</sup>

Yet Samuel made it sound like the new star in the sky was a separate sign from the night without darkness (Helaman 14:5).<sup>6</sup> In this regard, John A. Tvedtnes noted some possible similarities to the atmospheric effects caused by an explosion that took place in a remote part of Russia on June 30, 1908.<sup>7</sup> Known to scholars simply as the “Tunguska event,” scientists are still unsure what exactly caused the explosion.<sup>8</sup> Its effect on the night sky, however, is well documented. As reported by NASA, “Night skies glowed, and reports came in that people who lived as far away as Asia could read newspapers outdoors as late as midnight.”<sup>9</sup>

In the most comprehensive study on the event to date, Vladimir Rubtsov documented “atmospheric phenomena” in 155 different places,<sup>10</sup> spread across several days, beginning a few days before the explosion.<sup>11</sup> Tvedtnes reported, “For months afterward, there were spectacular sunrises and sunsets throughout the world, caused by the vast amount of dust thrown up into the atmosphere.”<sup>12</sup> There were also “daytime anomalies such as intense and prolonged solar halos, mother-of-pearl clouds, and a Bishop’s ring.”<sup>13</sup>

It was the night of June 30, however, which was most spectacular. According to Rubtsov, “throughout a territory of about 12 million km<sup>2</sup>, there was no night separating June 30 and July 1.”<sup>14</sup> That evening, a Soviet astronomer “waited in vain for night to fall,” and in Germany, “The intensity of the nighttime luminosity was considerable. . . . At 1.15 [AM] it was as light as daytime.”<sup>15</sup> Despite covering a vast region, “no atmospheric anomalies occurred in the area of Tunguska” itself,<sup>16</sup> and the intensity of nighttime light “seemed to increase from East to West,” thus indicating that it was brighter the farther away from the Tunguska explosion one went.<sup>17</sup>

## THE WHY

A miracle can be defined as “a beneficial event brought about through divine power that mortals do not understand and of themselves cannot duplicate.”<sup>18</sup> God uses miracles so that great benefits may be brought about for mankind “according to their faith” (see Mosiah 8:18; Alma 37:40). At the same time, Elder John A. Widtsoe, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve and himself a scientist, gave assurances that “This is a universe of law and order,” and thus “a miracle simply means a phenomenon not understood, in its cause and effect relations.”<sup>19</sup>

The phenomena and anomalies associated with the Tunguska event in 1908, with nightglows in the days before, with total day-like brightness the night after,

and also with continuing nightglows and even daytime effects in the days that followed surprisingly demonstrate at least one possible naturalistic understanding of how God could have fulfilled Samuel's prophecy,<sup>20</sup> even if such astronomical and atmospheric observations cannot be fully understood or explained.<sup>21</sup>

Regardless of the actual method the Lord used to accomplish this miracle, the night without darkness was deeply symbolic and meaningful. Kimberly M. Berkey noted, "The excessive light surrounding Christ's birth acts as a kind of morning,"<sup>22</sup> the beginning of a new dawn welcoming the Savior into the world: the Light of the World had come,<sup>23</sup> introduced into the world by light.

Furthermore, just as with the appearance of the new star, any method for making night bright as day would have required a great deal of advanced planning on the part of the Lord. Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, "the so-called 'little star of Bethlehem' was actually very large in its declaration of divine design! It had to have been placed in its precise orbit long, long before it shone so precisely!"<sup>24</sup>

Elder Maxwell went on to explain that the Lord puts the same care and attention into the lives of his children. "His overseeing precision pertains not only to astrophysical orbits but to human orbits as well."<sup>25</sup> Just as the new star "was in its precise orbit long before it so shone," so are individuals "placed in human orbits to illuminate."<sup>26</sup>

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*Originally Published as KnoWhy #188, "How was There a Night Without Darkness?" on September 15, 2016.*





## WHY DOES MORMON STATE THAT ‘ANGELS DID APPEAR UNTO WISE MEN’?

*“And angels did appear unto men, wise men, and did declare unto them glad tidings of great joy.”*

*Helaman 16:14*

### THE KNOW

In his abridgment of the book of Helaman, Mormon declared that “the scriptures began to be fulfilled” when angels started to appear to the people in the ninetieth year of the reign of the judges (Helaman 16:14). In making this statement, one of the scriptures that Mormon may have been referring to is Alma 13:26, in which Alma declared that the coming of Christ “shall be made known unto just and holy men, by the mouth of angels,” just as it had been made known unto their fathers.

Mention of the appearance of angels bringing information concerning the coming of the Savior into the world recurs frequently in the Book of Mormon. In 1 Nephi 11–14, an angel interpreted for Nephi the vision of his father, Lehi, and showed him the coming of Christ into the world and the fulfillment of Christ’s mission among mortals.<sup>1</sup>

Nephi wrote that an angel had told him (or his father) that “the God of Israel” would come six hundred years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem (1 Nephi 19:8). An angel told Nephi’s brother, Jacob, that the Lord God, the Holy One

of Israel, would come in the flesh to the Jews at Jerusalem and that they would scourge and crucify Him (2 Nephi 6:9). 2 Nephi 10:3 records a revelation to Jacob in which an angel told him that the One whose coming he was shown would be called “Christ.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Nephi related that, according to “the angel of God, his name shall be Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (2 Nephi 25:19).

King Benjamin, in his great speech to his people, told of how an angel had come to him and declared the “glad tidings of great joy,” of how “the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men” (Mosiah 3:5), and that He would perform great miracles, including the atoning sacrifice and the Resurrection (vv. 3–11).

When the coming of the expected Savior was finally near, the Book of Mormon record indicates that the scriptures began to be fulfilled, and angels began (again) to appear to “wise men” (Helaman 16:14).<sup>3</sup> One of these chosen men was the prophet and high priest Nephi, son of Nephi, grandson of Helaman, of whom the record states that “so great was his faith on the Lord Jesus Christ that angels did minister unto him daily” (3 Nephi 7:18).

## THE WHY

Why did Mormon interrupt his narrative to specify that angels began to appear to wise men? The fact that angels had come to Nephite prophets in the past and were prophesied to come in the future must have been generally known in Nephite societies. For example, when Aaron preached about Christ to the Amlicites (a group of Nephite apostates) in Alma 21, even they immediately supposed that he had received an angelic visit.<sup>4</sup> Alma 21:5 states that “there arose an Amlicite and began to contend with him, saying: What is that thou hast testified? Hast thou seen an angel?”<sup>5</sup>

On an earlier occasion, Alma had reminded his opponents in Ammonihah of another reason why angels are sent. The Lord sends angels to mortals because of their “faith and repentance and their holy works” (Alma 12:30; cf. Alma 11:31).

Mormon likely had episodes such as one in Helaman 16 in mind at the time when he summarized the several reasons why God sent angels to declare the coming of Christ:

For behold, God ... sent angels to minister unto the children of men, to make manifest concerning the coming of Christ ... Wherefore, by the ministering of angels, and by every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God, men began to exercise faith in Christ; ... and thus it was until the coming of Christ (Moroni 7:22, 25).

Mormon knew that our merciful Father in Heaven desired that His children have the ability to recognize the signs of the coming of Christ, whether it was in the time of Father Lehi, the prophet Samuel, in Mormon's own time, or in the days leading up to Christ's Second Coming. Our unchanging God would always send angels to visit worthy individuals who would have the faith, strength, and wisdom (hence "wise men") to declare the "glad tidings" and fortify the faith of those who have not had the same eye-witness manifestation.

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*Originally Published as KnoWhy #187, "Why Does Mormon State that 'Angels Did Appear unto Wise Men?'" on September 14, 2016.*





## WHY DIDN'T NEPHI MENTION MARY'S NAME?

*“Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things.”*

*1 Nephi 11:22*

### THE KNOW

In his vision of the Tree of Life, Nephi beheld a “virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins” (1 Nephi 11:15) who would become “the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh” (v. 18). Interestingly, while other Book of Mormon prophets clearly identified this virgin as Mary (see Mosiah 3:8; Alma 7:10), Nephi never did. Biblical scholar Matthew Bowen has asked, “Does it not seem strange then that Nephi would leave her name unmentioned, assuming he knew it? Where is her name?”

Bowen proposed that the answer can be found in the meaning of Mary’s name itself, which most likely derives from the Egyptian root *mr(i)* or *mry* which means “love” or “desire.”<sup>1</sup> Rather than directly stating Mary’s name, it seems that Nephi instead emphasized the meanings of the ancient root word from which her name was likely derived.

When Nephi’s angelic guide asked him if he knew of the “condescension of God,” Nephi responded, “I know that [God] **loveth** his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:17–18). Then, after showing Nephi a vision of Christ’s birth, the angel asked, “Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?” Nephi answered, “Yea, it is the **love** of God”



(vv. 21–22). Nephi used the term *love* twice more in this chapter, explaining that the “waters are a representation of the **love** of God; and ... that the tree of life was a representation of the **love** of God” (v. 25).<sup>2</sup>

The word *desire* also shows up with unusual frequency. The reason Nephi was privileged to behold this vision in the first place was because he “had **desired** to know the things that [his] father had seen” (1 Nephi 11:1). On several other occasions in this chapter, Nephi’s desire is similarly referenced: “Behold, what **desirest** thou?” (v. 2; cf. v. 10) ... I **desire** to behold the things which my father saw (v. 3) ... wherefore, thou shalt behold the things which thou hast **desired** (v. 6). Finally, following Nephi’s identification of the Tree of Life as the “love of God” in verse 22, Nephi explained that this love is “the most **desirable** above all things.”

Thus, on several occasions, the terms *love* and *desire*—the probable roots of Mary’s name—are used throughout this chapter. Notably, the only time they are used together in the same verse is when they describe the Tree of Life (1 Nephi 11:22). This seems to be more than a coincidence because there is good reason to associate the Tree of Life with Mary herself.

Just as the Tree of Life bore precious fruit, Mary bore Jesus Christ. Also, the association of the Tree of Life with a holy or divine mother figure was present in ancient Israelite religion.<sup>3</sup> By describing the Tree of Life as the “**love** of God” which was “most **desirable** above all things,” Nephi linked the sacred Tree with Egyptian root words that either literally or implicitly represented Mary’s name.<sup>4</sup> Bowen concluded that with Nephi’s awareness of both Egyptian and Hebrew, his “consciousness of Mary’s name and its meaning plausibly explains and motivates the dramatic emphasis on the ‘love of God’ in 1 Nephi 11 and his understanding of the overall meaning of the tree-of-life vision.”<sup>5</sup>

## THE WHY

This linguistic and textual analysis can help readers see Mary in a new light. According to the prophet Alma, she was “a **precious** and chosen vessel” (Alma 7:10; emphasis added). This description is meaningful because the fruit that Mary bore—the Son of God—was likewise symbolically described as being “most **precious** and most **desirable** above all other fruits” (1 Nephi 15:36; emphasis added).<sup>6</sup> Understood this way, Mary’s name appropriately symbolizes her mission to bring to the world the most desirable thing that God can offer—His precious Son, Jesus Christ, who perfectly manifests the Father’s eternal love for all of His children (see John 3:16).

Mary's role in bringing forth the Son of God was sacred and holy, a gift to all the earth. Likewise, the eternal role of motherhood is sacred and holy for all women who have or will experience its blessings, responsibilities, and gifts of life and love, whether during mortality or in the eternities to come.

Speaking to women in the October 1980 session of General Conference, Mary F. Foulger stated, "We stand in awe at Mary's assignment to be the mother of the Lord, but we, too, have been called to mother gods. Latter-day Saint women understand that the very purpose of creation depends upon our participation as earthly mothers to the spirit children of God."<sup>7</sup> While Mary is not to be worshipped or prayed to, she is to be honored, revered, and emulated. As Elder Bruce R. McConkie stated, "We should ... hold up Mary with that proper high esteem which is hers."<sup>8</sup>

Recognizing that Mary's name is associated with the love of God can help readers remember the eternal worth of all women and mothers.<sup>9</sup> It also helps explain why Mary plays such a prominent role in the opening scenes of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, as well as in Nephi's vision of the Tree of Life. What better way to emphasize God's love than by drawing attention to Christ's mother, who by the very meaning of her name was love personified and who brought forth the most *desirable* gift of God? It appears that by using the root meanings of Mary's name, instead of the name itself, Nephi subtly drew attention to her divinely appointed role to bring forth and raise the Christ Child.

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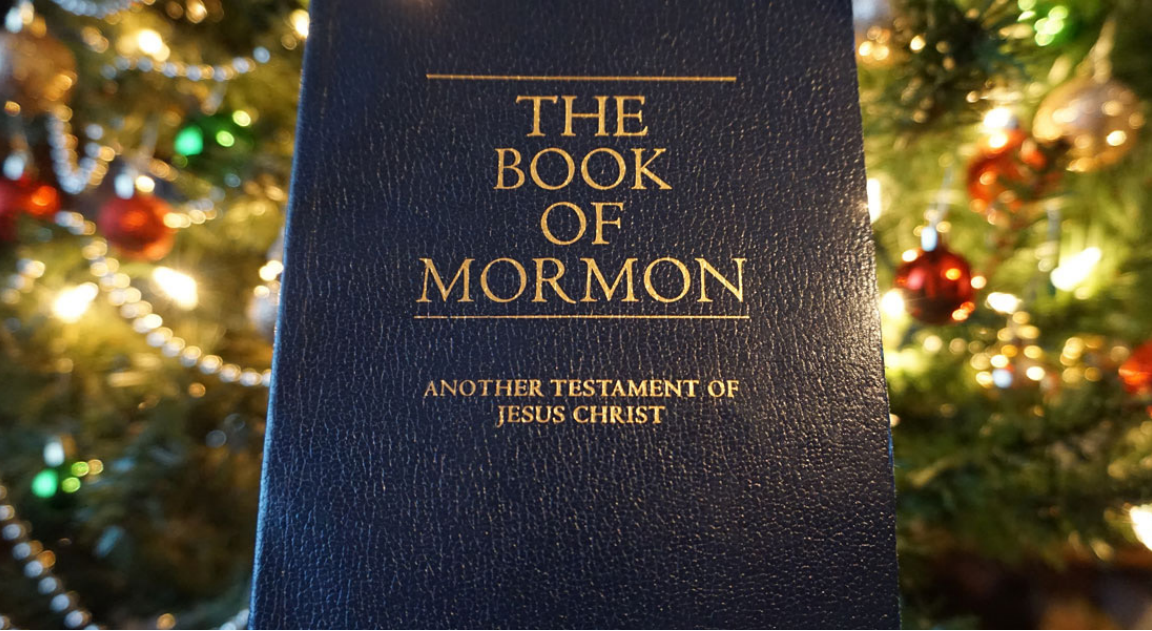
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THE  
BOOK  
OF  
MORMON

ANOTHER TESTAMENT OF  
JESUS CHRIST

## DID THE NEPHITES HAVE A “HOLIDAY SEASON” LIKE WE DO TODAY?

*“That they might give thanks to the Lord their God, who had brought them out of the land of Jerusalem, and who had delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, and had appointed just men to be their teachers, and also a just man to be their king, who had established peace in the land of Zarahemla, and who had taught them to keep the commandments of God, that they might rejoice and be filled with love towards God and all men.”*

*Mosiah 2:4*

### THE KNOW

In the United States, the “holiday season,” encompassing Thanksgiving, Christmas, and the New Year, carries with it a special feeling. People try to be kinder, spend more time with family, and they try to have the “Holiday spirit.”

Although the people in the Book of Mormon did not celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s like people do today, they appear to have celebrated three similar holidays in close succession in their own sort of “holiday season.”<sup>1</sup> These holidays were Rosh Hashana (the Israelite New Year), Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), and Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles).<sup>2</sup>

Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch have stated that “the various components of the autumn festival were celebrated as a single season of celebration in the earliest periods of Israelite history.”<sup>3</sup> It was only later on that its “many elements

were ... sharply differentiated.<sup>14</sup> King Benjamin's speech "touches on all the major themes of these sacred days, treating them as parts of a single festival complex, consistent with what one would expect in a pre-exilic Israelite community in which the fall feasts were not sharply differentiated but were still closely associated as parts of one large autumn festival."<sup>15</sup>

During Israelite New Year's Day celebrations, for example, worshippers would offer sacrifices of animals that were of "the first year" (see Leviticus 23:24–25).<sup>16</sup> This is what Benjamin's people did. They brought "the *firstlings* of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses" (Mosiah 2:3).<sup>17</sup> Both events celebrated God's kingship as well. King Benjamin declared: "If I, whom ye call your king, ... do merit any thanks from you, O how you ought to thank your heavenly King" (v. 19).<sup>18</sup> Szink and Welch have noted that the Talmud and other Jewish and ancient Near Eastern literature similarly connect the idea of divine kingship directly to the New Year.<sup>19</sup>

Both the Israelite New Year and King Benjamin's speech stress remembrance.<sup>10</sup> In Leviticus 23:23–25, the event that is the equivalent of a New Year's celebration is literally called a *zikkaron* (remembrance).<sup>11</sup> The first six chapters of Mosiah alone mention some form of the word "remember" 15 times.<sup>12</sup> King Benjamin's speech and the Israelite New Year also focused on the king.<sup>13</sup> Szink and Welch noted, "This was apparently the preferred time for the coronation of the king and the renewal of the people's covenant to obey him and God."<sup>14</sup> During King Benjamin's speech, Mosiah received his coronation (Mosiah 2:30), and the people all covenanted to obey the laws of the king and of God (Mosiah 5:5).<sup>15</sup>

King Benjamin's speech also contains elements that reflect the Day of Atonement.<sup>16</sup> Besides mentioning "atonement" seven times in his speech,<sup>17</sup> Benjamin wove themes from the Day of Atonement into his message.<sup>18</sup> According to Leviticus 16, the high priest was supposed to use the blood of the Day of Atonement sacrifice to cleanse the tabernacle.<sup>19</sup>

Benjamin's references to "the atoning blood of Christ" (Mosiah 3:18) are likely allusions to this law.<sup>20</sup>

Another element of the Day of Atonement was that the priest would cleanse the people from various iniquities, especially from commandments violated in ignorance (Numbers 15:27–29).<sup>21</sup>

As King Benjamin put it, Christ, through His Atonement, can redeem "those ... who have ignorantly sinned" (Mosiah 3:11).<sup>22</sup>

According to Szink and Welch, Leviticus 16:7–10 describes a ritual “in which the high priest, on the Day of Atonement, took two goats; by casting lots one goat was declared to be ‘for the Lord’ and the other” as a Scapegoat.<sup>23</sup> They noted,

A similar dichotomy appears in Mosiah 5:7–12, in which the people are called either by the name of Christ and found belonging at the right hand of God, or are called “by some other name” and found at the left hand of God. According to later rabbinic tradition, if the lot “For the Lord” came up in the left hand it was permissible to switch the lots with their respective goats so that although the determination of which goat was the Lord’s was made by lot, the Lord’s goat would be on the right hand while [the other] would be on the left.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, Benjamin’s speech is similar to the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot).<sup>25</sup> Deuteronomy 31:10–12 states that the people should gather as family units near the temple or tabernacle for this festival.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Benjamin’s people were instructed to “gather themselves together” (Mosiah 1:18), “every man according to his family” (Mosiah 2:5), “round about” the temple (v. 6).<sup>27</sup> They also stayed in tents during this meeting (Mosiah 2:6).<sup>28</sup> Welch and Szink have noted, “Tents were specifically mentioned in connection with the celebration of Solomon’s dedication of the temple ... (1 Kings 8:65–66). This feast, in which tents were used, was held in the seventh month (see 1 Kings 8:2) and has generally been thought of as a Feast of Tabernacles.”<sup>29</sup>

Also, according to Szink and Welch, ancient Israelites “renewed their covenant with God to be his people and to obey his laws” at the Feast of Tabernacles.<sup>30</sup>

“Benjamin’s people also enter into such a covenant, and they follow the form of covenant renewal in Israel in detail. Through this covenant, the people became the sons and daughters of God.”<sup>31</sup>

Also, “Jewish texts attest to the association between the king and the Feast of Tabernacles.”<sup>32</sup> In these texts, “the king stands upon a specially constructed platform, and he is given a copy of the law from which he reads various passages from Deuteronomy ... dealing with the law and covenant-making.”<sup>33</sup> Standing on a tower reciting material related to covenant-making is exactly what one sees in King Benjamin’s speech.

## THE WHY

Although it is impossible to know exactly how the people of King Benjamin were feeling when they were listening to his speech, we may be able to have some idea. If his speech was given during the Nephite “holiday season” as it seems to have been, it is possible that they were feeling the way we feel today during our autumn/early winter holiday season.

Sukkot, like our Thanksgiving, is a harvest festival, and would naturally lend itself to the feelings of gratitude for God's blessings during the year that characterizes the modern holiday. Yom Kippur, for the Nephites, would have been a day when they looked forward with a feeling of reverence towards the sacrifice of the Savior, just as Christmas is for us. Rosh Hashanah, like our new year, is a time of hope and anticipation for the New Year. Although not exactly the same, perhaps the way we feel during the First Presidency Christmas Devotional is similar to the way they felt listening to King Benjamin's speech, when these feelings combine to create a special holiday spirit.

As Szink and Welch explained, King Benjamin's speech "makes good sense if one understands Benjamin's speech as taking place during the season of the year when the Nephites would have been turning their hearts and minds to the kinds of themes and concerns that characterized this time of annual religious renewal and activity in ancient Israel."<sup>34</sup>

Regardless of how the people actually felt during this speech, King Benjamin's focus on Christ and on caring for one another reflects the essence of the "Christmas spirit." May we all keep this spirit with us this holiday season, and always.

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## WHY DID THE WISE MEN GIVE JESUS GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH?

*“Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered.”*

*2 Nephi 2:7*

### THE KNOW

Shortly after Jesus was born, “wise men from the east” visited Him and gave Him gold, frankincense, and myrrh as gifts (Matthew 2:1). These gifts were all extremely valuable and expensive, and were the appropriate gifts for the “king of the Jews” as the wise men called Jesus (v.2). However, many people have shown that these gifts could be symbolic as well.<sup>1</sup>

Because crowns were traditionally made of gold, gold was thought to represent Christ’s kingship.<sup>2</sup>

Because of its use in religious ceremonies, frankincense was thought to represent Christ’s role as a priest.<sup>3</sup> And because of its use in the embalming of Jesus, myrrh was thought to foreshadow Christ’s death.<sup>4</sup> Although the Book of Mormon does not record these gifts that Christ received, it does refer to Christ’s roles as king and priest, as well as His death and resurrection.



## Christ as King

The motif of Christ as King often appears in the Book of Mormon. However, many people do not recognize this because the Book of Mormon often uses words for “king” that modern readers associate with other things. The word Christ, for example, is Greek for “anointed one” and is often used to refer to kings, who were anointed when they received their coronation (see 2 Samuel 2:4).<sup>5</sup>

This word is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *Messiah*, which also has the same connotations.<sup>6</sup> Therefore when we see “Christ” or “Messiah” in the Book of Mormon, one thing we should be thinking of is Christ’s role as Divine King.<sup>7</sup>

## Christ as Priest

One occasion when the Book of Mormon mentions Christ’s role as priest is in 2 Nephi 2:7: “Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered.”<sup>8</sup> The Old Testament refers to offering a sacrifice 49 times,<sup>9</sup> and the Book of Mormon refers to it 5 times.<sup>10</sup> In every case, offering a sacrifice refers to offering sacrifices according to the Law of Moses. Because these sacrifices were generally performed by priests, this verse is a reminder of Christ’s role as priest (see Hebrews 9:11).<sup>11</sup>

## Christ’s Death and Resurrection

The power of Christ’s death and resurrection is the essence of the Book of Mormon, and it shows that Christ’s death is essential for all humanity: “Behold, they will crucify him; and after he is laid in a sepulchre for the space of three days he shall rise from the dead, with healing in his wings; and all those who shall believe on his name shall be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 25:13).<sup>12</sup> The Book of Mormon powerfully testifies that “the redemption of the people” is “brought to pass through the power, and sufferings, and death of Christ, and his resurrection and ascension into heaven” (Mosiah 18:2).

## THE WHY

In a world where chaos sometimes holds sway, knowing that Christ is the king of the universe can bring comfort to our troubled lives.<sup>13</sup> Christ rules over all that is, and will eventually triumph over evil, no matter how much evil we may sometimes experience.<sup>14</sup> Because Christ is king, we can find peace.

Knowing that Christ is, as the author of Hebrews put it, “an high priest of good things to come,” (Hebrews 9:11) He can also help us as we go through life.<sup>15</sup> The high priest of the Old Testament entered into the Holy of Holies once a year with the blood of an animal to atone for sins.<sup>16</sup> But Christ, “by his own blood”

has “entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Hebrews 9:12). Because Christ, the ultimate High Priest, has offered Himself for each of us, we can turn to Him to find redemption and to reconcile ourselves with God.<sup>17</sup> Finally, because of Christ’s death and resurrection, we can all overcome death and pain. Christ’s power allows all of us to be freed from the troubles of mortality, including physical death.<sup>18</sup>

Especially during the Christmas season, we can all remember the power of Christ’s Atonement and resurrection and the power He has to help us through our own lives. And when we think of the gold, frankincense and myrrh offered by the wise men, we can all remember Christ’s roles of king and priest and the power of his death and resurrection.<sup>19</sup> These gifts, given by the wise men, remind us all of Christ’s gifts to us. These gifts can give us hope, reconciliation with God, and freedom from death.

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## WHY DOES THE BOOK OF MORMON TALK ABOUT A “LAND OF JERUSALEM”?

*“And I, Nephi, and my brethren took our journey in the wilderness, with our tents, to go up to the land of Jerusalem”*

*1 Nephi 3:9*

### THE KNOW

The Book of Mormon and the Bible are both ancient records which testify of Jesus Christ, but there are naturally both differences and similarities between these two sacred histories. Studying some of the differences, even when they are minor or subtle, can be interesting and insightful, and sometimes even testimony building.

Take, for example, the phrase “land of Jerusalem,” which shows up about 40 times in the Book of Mormon, nearly half appearing in 1 and 2 Nephi.<sup>1</sup> Yet in the Bible, Jerusalem is never portrayed as a *land*, only a *city*. This fact actually drew some criticism in Joseph Smith’s day. In 1838, an anti-Mormon writer insisted, “There is no such land. No part of Palestine bears the name Jerusalem, except the city itself.”<sup>2</sup>

Today, however, ancient sources have confirmed that Jerusalem was understood as both a city and a land.<sup>3</sup> As Hugh Nibley pointed out long ago, several of the Amarna Letters refer to the “land of Jerusalem.”<sup>4</sup> These letters represent the correspondence from the rulers of several Canaanite city-states to the Egyptian

Pharaoh in the mid-14th century BC, including 6 from 'Abdi-Heba, the ruler of Jerusalem at the time.<sup>5</sup> "Behold," wrote 'Abdi-Heba, "the king [of Egypt] has set his name in the *land of Jerusalem* for ever; so he cannot abandon the *lands of Jerusalem!*"<sup>6</sup>

In the Dead Sea Scrolls, a story about Jeremiah talks about captives "from the *land of Jerusalem*" being escorted to Babylon.<sup>7</sup> While the story itself most likely dates to the around the first century BC, it is set in 587 BC in the aftermath of the final Babylonian invasion, and bears some interesting similarities to the opening chapters of the Book of Mormon.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to this evidence for the expression itself, archaeological evidence indicates that the phrase *land of Jerusalem* accurately reflects the settlement patterns specific to Lehi's time. In the seventh century BC, "Jerusalem was located in the centre of a sort of district, which encompassed the capital and its periphery, including the agricultural areas of the city's residents, as well as satellite settlements directly connected to Jerusalem proper."<sup>9</sup> These satellite settlements would harvest goods which were shipped back to the capital city to meet the needs of its growing population.<sup>10</sup>

According to Yigal Moyal and Avraham Faust, "One may treat the entire region, including ... 'satellite' settlements, as part of Jerusalem's own hinterland."<sup>11</sup> Nephi's use of the phrase *land of Jerusalem* may appropriately refer to this "hinterland" surrounding the city itself.

Significantly, these circumstances were unique to the seventh century BC. "Never before in the history of the region," explained Yuval Gadot, "were there so many sites of different functions and size around Jerusalem." The reason for this population growth around Jerusalem, according to Gadot, was the devastation of the Judean countryside by the Assyrian army at the end of the 8th century BC. "Jerusalem survived but the Assyrian assault had a devastating impact on the kingdom," forcing populations to relocate to the regions immediately surrounding Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup>

Hence, as Robert Eisenman and Michael Wise observed, the expression *land of Jerusalem* in the Dead Sea Scrolls' story about Jeremiah, "greatly enhances the sense of historicity" of the narrative, since at this time Judah "consisted of little more than Jerusalem and its immediate environs."<sup>13</sup> Since Jeremiah was Lehi's contemporary, then logically the phrase *land of Jerusalem* "greatly enhances" the Book of Mormon's "sense of historicity" as well.<sup>14</sup>

## THE WHY

Of course, this subtle difference between biblical and Book of Mormon expressions for Jerusalem is not, by itself, of great eternal worth. Nonetheless, paying careful attention to this small difference provided an opportunity to learn more about the ancient world from which both ancient records come—which, in turn, can help us better understand the scriptural teachings in context. Since the archaeology and ancient sources which corroborate the Book of Mormon only became available recently, this can also build our testimonies in the Book of Mormon as a reliable witness of truth.

Taking the time to patiently investigate other, seemingly more significant differences in the historical, doctrinal, and spiritual truths taught by these two witnesses of Christ can be even more enlightening. Take, for example, Alma’s statement that the Savior “shall be born of Mary, at *Jerusalem*” (Alma 7:10), instead of Bethlehem, as indicated in the Gospels (see Matthew 2; Luke 2). Some have seen this as a major contradiction between the testimonies of Christ found in the Book of Mormon and the Bible.

Yet Alma’s full statement refers to “Jerusalem which is the *land* of our forefathers,” indicating that Alma had the *land*, not the *city*, of Jerusalem in mind. In one of his letters to Pharaoh, ‘Abdi-Ĥeba mentioned “a town of the land of Jerusalem, Bit-*Lahmi* by name,” which the late W.F. Albright believed was “an almost certain reference to the town of Bethlehem.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, a seventh century BC seal impression from Bethlehem was found in Jerusalem, indicating it was one of the “satellite settlements” of Jerusalem’s hinterland, sending its surplus goods to Jerusalem.<sup>16</sup>

Bethlehem was evidently part of the “land of Jerusalem” in antiquity. Rather than seeing Alma’s statement as a major contradiction with the Bible, careful investigation reveals that it actually represents an accurate understanding of the relationship of Bethlehem to Jerusalem in Lehi’s time.<sup>17</sup> Alma likely used the more general reference because his New World audience would not have been as familiar with “regions round about” Jerusalem (2 Nephi 25:1–6).

Thanks to the additional witness of archaeology and other ancient sources, we now know that both the Bible and Book of Mormon bear accurate witness of the Savior’s birth from an ancient perspective.

## FURTHER READING

Neal Rappleye, “Nephite History in Context 2: Special Issue,” *Studio et Quoque Fide* (December 2017).

Daniel C. Peterson, Matthew Roper, and William J. Hamblin, "On Alma 7:10 and the Birthplace of Jesus Christ" (*FARMS Papers*, 1995).

Gordon C. Thomasson, "Revisiting the Land of Jerusalem," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 139–141.

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## ENDNOTES

### HOW DID NEPHI READ ISAIAH AS A WITNESS OF CHRIST'S COMING?

1. Book of Mormon Central, "What Vision Guides Nephi's Choice of Isaiah Chapters? (2 Nephi 11:2)" *KnoWhy* 38 (February 22, 2016); John W. Welch, "Getting Through Isaiah with the Help of the Nephite Prophetic View," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 19–45.
2. Welch, "Getting Through Isaiah," 20.
3. Book of Mormon Central, "How Did God Call His Prophets in Ancient Times? (1 Nephi 15:8)," *KnoWhy* 17 (January 22, 2016); David E. Bokovoy, "'Thou Knowest That I Believe': Invoking The Spirit of the Lord as Council Witness in 1 Nephi 11," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 1 (2012): 1–23.
4. See Stephen D. Ricks, "Heavenly Visions and Prophetic Calls in Isaiah 6 (2 Nephi 16), the Book of Mormon, and the Revelation of John," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 171–190.
5. David E. Bokovoy, "On Christ and Covenants: An LDS Reading of Isaiah's Prophetic Call," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 3 (2011): 45.
6. Bokovoy, "On Christ and Covenants," 45. Bokovoy also notes, "this proposal strengthens the tie between Isaiah's and Lehi's call narratives for ... Lehi's throne theophany specifically included a vision of God the Father seated upon the throne, followed by a personal interaction with Christ, one of the angelic host in the heavenly assembly."
7. Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 29–30.
8. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, "'More Fully Persuaded': Isaiah's Witness of Christ's Ministry," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 4.

### WHY DID SAMUEL MAKE SUCH CHRONOLOGICALLY PRECISE PROPHECIES?

1. The only other example in the Book of Mormon, also involving the timing of Christ's birth, is Lehi's and Nephi's 600-year prophecy (see 1 Nephi 10:3; 19:8; 2 Nephi 25:19). Samuel's five-year prophecy was particularly unique. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 5:190: "The specificity of this prophecy is unique in the scriptural canon. Other time-specific prophecies (e.g., that the Messiah would be born six hundred years from Lehi's departure from Jerusalem, and that the Nephites would be destroyed in four hundred years) were uttered about a future so distant that no listener would still be alive. Because six hundred and four hundred are round numbers, they also might be understood by the listeners as generic rather than specific figures. ... The five-year prophecy, however, is absolute, finite, and testable within the lifetime of virtually all of Samuel's listeners."
2. While Samuel's prophecy in Helaman 14 never mentions the timing of the sign of Christ's death, it is evident from 3 Nephi 8:1–4 that the timing had been revealed to the Nephites at some point. Whether it was Samuel who revealed the timing or someone else is not clear, as it only says that the people "began to look with great earnestness for the sign which had been given by the prophet Samuel" (v. 3). Only the sign, not the timing, is connected to Samuel. Perhaps the timing was revealed by the "just man" who kept the record and "did many miracles in the name of Jesus" (v. 1). It could also have been revealed in some of the "much preaching and prophesying which was sent among them" in the wake of the first



- sign (3 Nephi 2:10). If it was Samuel, it would appear that Mormon omitted that detail when he copied over Samuel's prophecies, perhaps for the reasons suggested here: the timing did not coincide with a number full of symbolic significance.
3. For general reference and background on the Mesoamerican calendrical systems, including the long count (*tun*) system, see Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya* (London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 48–54; Kaylee Spencer-Ahrens and Linnea H. Wren, "Arithmetic, Astronomy, and the Calendar," in Lynn V. Foster, *Handbook to Life in the Ancient Maya World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 250–260; Joel W. Palka, *The A to Z of Ancient Mesoamerica* (Lanham, MA: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 22–23.
  4. John E. Clark, "Archaeological Trends and Book of Mormon Origins," in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2005), 90.
  5. Mark Alan Wright, "Nephite Daykeepers: Ritual Specialists in Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon," in *Ancient Temple Worship: Proceedings of the Expound Symposium, 14 May 2011*, ed. Matthew B. Brown, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, Stephen D. Ricks, and John S. Thompson (Salt Lake City and Orem, UT: Eborn Books and Interpreter Foundation, 2014), 253: "The twenty-year katun was subdivided into five-year periods called *hotuns*, which were often celebrated by royalty and commemorated in monumental inscriptions." Also see Prudence M. Rice, "Time, Memory, and Resilience among the Maya," in *Millenary Maya Societies: Past Crises and Resilience*, ed. M.-Charlotte Arnauld and Alain Breton (Mesoweb Press, 2013), 13: "The completion of full twenty-year k'atun or their five-year quarters were regularly celebrated by rulers in what Mayanists call 'Period-Ending' (hereafter PE) ceremonies."
  6. John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985), 274.
  7. It is important to note that the Nephites need not be using the Mayan calendar to nonetheless recognize the sacred importance of these numbers in the calendaring of their neighbors, and to even be influenced in such a way to as also give weight and import to time cycles of 5, 20, and 400 years themselves. Though commonly referred to as the "Maya" calendar system, it was known throughout Mesoamerica and likely had its origins among the Olmec between 500–400 BC. The earliest long count date attested is 36 BC, on Stela 2 in Chiapa de Corzo, confirming it's use in Samuel's time. See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 5:177; Foster, *Handbook to Life*, 36–37. Interestingly, Chiapa de Corzo is in Chiapas, Mexico in the Grijalva River valley, believed by some scholars to be the land of Zarahemla. Chiapa de Corzo is even identified by some scholars as the Nephite city of Sidom. See John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985), 5–38, 148–167, 197, 204–206; Joseph L. Allen and Blake L. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, revised edition (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2011), 748–749, 770–772; John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013), 128, 581–585, 592, 597–598.
  8. John E. Clark, "Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 2 (2005): 47. Also, Clark, "Archaeological Trends," 90: "The Book of Mormon records several references to a significant four-hundred-year prophecy, consistent with this idiosyncratic Mesoamerican calendar practice." In addition to Helaman 13:5, 9, see Alma 45:10; Mormon 8:6; Moroni 10:1.
  9. Wright, "Nephite Daykeepers," 253.

10. John L. Sorenson, “The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 409; Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 193, 440–441.
11. The 400-year prophecy appears to have been understood and interpreted as 400 years from the birth of Christ (Mormon 8:6–7). Alma 45:10 says “the Nephites ... in four hundred years from the time that Jesus Christ shall manifest himself unto them, shall dwindle in unbelief.”
12. Rice, “Time, Memory, and Resilience,” 16.
13. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 274.
14. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 5:177.
15. Personal communication to Book of Mormon Central staff.
16. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 439; Rice, “Time, Memory, and Resilience,” 13, 16: “For the Maya, time was simultaneously linear and cyclical, an endless—‘timeless’—rotation of *k’atun*, *b’ak’tun*, and multiple eras of creation (as in the Popol Vuh).” Spencer-Ahrens and Wren, “Arithmetic, Astronomy, and the Calendar,” 247: “The cycles dominated Maya thought and resulted in a deterministic view in which history repeated itself. If a given day or period resulted in dreadful consequences once, it would do so again when the day returned or when the cycle repeated itself.” Just as with the important numbers themselves (5, 20, and 400 year cycles), the Nephites need not be using the Maya calendar itself in order to have enculturated views of time as cyclical.
17. Spencer-Ahrens and Wren, “Arithmetic, Astronomy, and the Calendar,” 257, noted, “each *k’atun* expressed a prophecy of the future while at the same time embodying the historical past.” Samuel seems to be expressing the same concept, only using a *baktun* rather than a *katun*.
18. Evidence for these notions of cyclical time may be evident in the Book of Mormon. For instance, notice that 20 years (one *katun*) after Samuel said “the sword of justice hangeth over this people” (Helaman 13:5), Mormon reported that “the sword of destruction did hang over” the Nephites once again (3 Nephi 2:19).
19. Wright, “Nephite Daykeepers,” 253; Rice, “Time, Memory, and Resilience,” 13. Again, for Nephites influenced by the surrounding culture, 5, 20, or 400 year periods can be deemed important, celebratory occasions without necessarily adopting the Maya calendar.
20. See Mark Alan Wright, “‘According to Their Language, unto Their Understanding’: The Cultural Context Hierophanies and Theophanies in Latter-day Saint Canon,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 3 (2011): 51–65.

## WHAT DOES THE VIRGIN MARY HAVE TO DO WITH THE TREE OF LIFE?

1. Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 29.
2. Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8–23,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 194.
3. John S. Thompson, “The Lady at the Horizon: Egyptian Tree Goddess Iconography and Sacred Trees in Israelite Scripture and Temple Theology,” in *Ancient Temple Worship: Proceedings of The Expound Symposium*, 14 May 2011, ed. Matthew B. Brown, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, Stephen D. Ricks, and John S. Thompson (Orem, Utah: Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2014), 225–226.
4. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah,” 196–198.
5. See “Mother in Heaven,” Gospel Topics.
6. Samuel Zinner, “‘Zion’ and ‘Jerusalem’ as Lady Wisdom in Moses 7 and Nephi’s Tree of Life Vision,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 12 (2014): 313.

7. Margaret Barker, "Joseph Smith and Preexilic Israelite Religion," in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 76.

## HOW DOES THE BOOK OF MORMON HELP DATE CHRIST'S BIRTH?

1. See Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ," *BYU Studies* 49, no. 4 (2010): 6–9. Some Latter-day Saints might be surprised to learn that not everyone, including respected authorities and apostles like Orson Pratt, Hyrum M. Smith, J. Reuben Clark, and Bruce R. McConkie, agrees with the tradition, started 100 years ago by James E. Talmage, that Christ was born on April 6, 1 BC, based on Doctrine and Covenants 20:1. The best evidence indicates that the Doctrine and Covenants 20:1 was written by John Whitmer as an introduction to the revelation (4 days after the fact), and "X years since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh" appears to be Whitmer's fancy way of expressing the date. It is used in the Church Historical record by Whitmer in reference to June 12, 1831, for instance. See Chadwick, "Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ," 6–9, 28–29 n.12; Lincoln H. Blumell and Thomas A. Wayment, "When Was Jesus Born? A Response to a Recent Proposal," *BYU Studies* 51, no. 3 (2012): 71–72; Steven C. Harper, "Historical Headnotes and the Index of Contents in the Book of Commandments and Revelations," *BYU Studies* 48, no. 3 (2009): 57. Also see Randall P. Spackman, "Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates," (FARMS Preliminary Reports, 1993), 70–74; Tvedtnes, "When Was Christ Born?" 13–14; Thomas A. Wayment, "The Birth and Death Dates of Jesus Christ," in *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*, 3 vols., ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2005), 1:83–85.
2. See Blumell and Wayment, "When Was Jesus Born?" 54–59.
3. See John A. Tvedtnes, "When Was Christ Born?" *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 10 (2014): 17–24. Some Christians (mainly Eastern Orthodox) celebrate Christmas on January 6. See Taylor Halverson, "The Real 12 Days of Christmas and Why April 6 is a Religiously Significant Date," *Deseret News*, December 13, 2014.
4. See Tvedtnes, "When Was Christ Born?" 1–2.
5. See Chadwick, "Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ," 11–14; Wayment, "The Birth and Death Dates of Jesus Christ," 385–387; Blumell and Wayment, "When Was Jesus Born?" 59–62; Tvedtnes, "When Was Christ Born?" 4; Spackman, "Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology," 48–51. On the other hand, the account in Luke 2 mentioning Cyrenius (Luke 2:2) would require the story to take place sometime around AD 6–7. This is clearly at odds with the death of Herod, and as such most scholars regard this detail as erroneous. See Blumell and Wayment, "When Was Jesus Born?" 61.
6. For discussions on the dating of the Savior's death, see Chadwick, "Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ," 15–17; Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Dating the Death of Jesus Christ," *BYU Studies* 54, no. 4 (2015): 135–191; Blumell and Wayment, "When Was Jesus Born?" 64–70; Wayment, "The Birth and Death Dates of Jesus Christ," 391–394; Spackman, "Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology," 60–61.
7. Wayment, "The Birth and Death Dates of Jesus Christ," 394. See also Chadwick, "Dating the Death of Jesus Christ," 139–142 for a review of scholars who agree with this timing. However, Blumell and Wayment, "When Was Jesus Born?" 64–70 urge caution against being too dogmatic about this date.
8. See Chadwick, "Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ," 17–18.
9. See Chadwick, "Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ," 17–18.
10. For discussion of these issues from various perspectives, see Wayment, "The Birth and Death Dates of Jesus Christ," 393; Chadwick, "Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ," 18–21, 34–35 nn.48–51; Blumell and Wayment, "When Was Jesus Born?" 62–64, 76–77 nn.39–45; Chadwick, "Dating the Death of Jesus Christ," 142–149; Spackman,

- “Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology”; Randall P. Spackman, “The Jewish/Lunar Calendar,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998): 48–59, 71; Randall P. Spackman, *A Source Book for Book of Mormon Chronology* (2010–215), online at <http://www.bookofmormonchronology.net/>; David Rolph Seely, “Chronology, Book of Mormon,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003), 196–204; Robert F. Smith, “Book of Mormon Event Structure: The Ancient Near East,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 2 (1996): 98–147; John L. Sorenson, “The Nephite Calendar in Mosiah, Alma, and Helaman,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 173–175. Chadwick, “Dating the Death of Jesus Christ,” 145 n.43, 147 n.45, mistakenly asserted that the Mesoamerican *tun* was not considered a “year” by either scholars or the ancient Maya. For a response, see Neal Rappleye, “Was the Mayan Tun a ‘Year?’” at *Studio et Quoque Fide: A Blog on Latter-day Saint Apologetics, Scholarship, and Commentary*, December 14, 2016, online at [studioetquoquefide.com](http://studioetquoquefide.com).
11. Blumell and Wayment, “When Was Jesus Born?” 64.
  12. See Orson Pratt, “The Latter-day Kingdom of God—Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon—External Testimony,” *Journal of Discourses* 13, discourse 16, April 10, 1870, online at <https://journalofdiscourses.com/13/16>. Also see Orson Pratt, “True Christmas and New Year,” *Journal of Discourses* 15, discourse 33, December 29, 1872, online at <https://journalofdiscourses.com/15/33>; Spackman, “Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology,” 48, 53; Wayment, “The Birth and Death Dates of Jesus Christ,” 387–388, 393–394; Chadwick, “Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ,” 25. Pratt (April 11, 4 BC), Spackman (March 23, 5 BC), Wayment (spring or winter, 5 BC), and Chadwick (December 5 BC) each make different assumptions about Nephite calendaring and chronology.
  13. Chadwick, “Dating the Death of Jesus Christ,” 190.
  14. See Book of Mormon Central, “How Was There a Night Without Darkness? (3 Nephi 1:15),” *KnoWhy* 188 (September 15, 2016).

## HOW WAS THERE A NIGHT WITHOUT DARKNESS?

1. See Book of Mormon Central, “Why Did Samuel Make Such Chronologically Precise Prophecies? (Helaman 13:5),” *KnoWhy* 184 (September 9, 2016).
2. Even though some believed the earth could move at God’s command, “and it appeareth unto man that the sun standeth still” (Helaman 12:15), Samuel was clearly talking about something else entirely, as he said they would be able to clearly discern the setting and rising of the sun, and there would still be no darkness (Helaman 14:4). So the sun would not appear still in this instance. For discussion of Nephite cosmology, see Book of Mormon, “Why Did Mormon Say the Children of Men are Less than the Dust of the Earth? (Helaman 12:7),” *KnoWhy* 183 (September 8, 2016).
3. A similar event is prophesied to take place around the time of the Lord’s second coming: “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: But it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light” (Zachariah 14:6–7).
4. Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. (American Fork and Provo, UT: Covenant Communications and FARMS, 2004), 3:291. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 5:191–192, critiqued this suggestion and proposed, instead, that it was a volcanic eruption, which would have provided light more locally.
5. “Astronomers Peg Brightness of History’s Brightest Star,” *National Optical Astronomy Observatory News*, March 5, 2003, online at [nao.edu](http://nao.edu). This is reporting on a supernova documented in AD 1006, not 1054.

6. Gardner, *Second Witness*, 5:191–192: “If a day, a night, and a day of light had occurred in the Old World, the evangelists who noted other signs and miracles of Christ’s birth would surely have made it part of their record. We must therefore assume that the lighted night was a New World phenomenon, not a worldwide one. . . . A bright new star would be a good explanation for the Old World phenomenon, but there is still the issue of the differentially described phenomena for the Old and New Worlds. The descriptions point to different underlying events that are described in a similar context.”
7. John A. Tvedtnes, “A Modern Example of Night without Darkness,” *Insights: An Ancient Window* 18, no. 5 (October 1998): 4.
8. Nigel Waston, “The Tunguska Event,” *History Today* 58, no. 7 (July 2008): 7.
9. Tony Phillips, “The Tunguska Impact—100 Years Later,” *NASA Science News*, June 30, 2008, online at science.nasa.gov.
10. Vladimir Rubtsov, *The Tunguska Mystery* (New York, NY: Springer, 2009), 15.
11. Rubtsov, *The Tunguska Mystery*, 13.
12. Tvedtnes, “A Modern Example,” 4.
13. Rubtsov, *The Tunguska Mystery*, 21. A Bishop’s ring “is a diffuse brown or bluish halo around the Sun” (p. 21), so-called because of its discovery by the Reverend S. Bishop.
14. Rubtsov, *The Tunguska Mystery*, 14.
15. Rubtsov, *The Tunguska Mystery*, 17.
16. Rubtsov, *The Tunguska Mystery*, 17. On p. 18, it is noted that the nearest report to Tunguska is 600 km away.
17. Rubtsov, *The Tunguska Mystery*, 18.
18. Paul C. Hedengren, “Miracles,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1992), 2:908.
19. John A. Widtsoe, *Joseph Smith as Scientist: A Contribution to Mormon Philosophy* (Salt Lake City, UT: YMMIA, 1908), 35. Also see Book of Mormon Central, “What Kind of Earthquake Caused the Prison Walls to Fall? (Alma 14:29),” *KnoWhy* 121 (June 14, 2016).
20. Interestingly, Aztec sources report a similar phenomenon ca. AD 1500. Waston, “The Tunguska Event,” 7 quoted one source as describing the falling object which caused the Tunguska explosion as a “forked tongue of flames,” which is strikingly similar to the account of “an omen of evil” in the Florentine Codex. “Ten years before the Spaniards arrived here, an omen of evil first appeared in the heavens. It was like a *tongue of fire, like a flame*, like the light of dawn. . . . It was there to the east when it thus came forth at midnight; *it looked as if day had dawned, day had broken*. Later, the sun destroyed it when he rose.” Florentine Codex, as cited in Gardner, *Second Witness*, 5:192, 238, emphasis added. Gardner pointed out that this account “is historical evidence that people in [Mesoamerica] saw signs in the heavens which made night as bright as day. This passage is not necessarily evidence of the lights themselves, but it documents that at least some Mesoamericans accepted that such phenomenon was possible and that it had a divine significance . . . it is not hard to understand how the Nephites might have likewise believed in and described a similar culturally significant phenomenon” (p. 238).
21. While obviously no explosion was reported in the Book of Mormon, it should be pointed out that (1) the explosion happened in the morning of June 30, 1908, so would not have been seen immediately before nightfall; and (2) the nightlight effect was stronger at greater distances away from the explosion. If a similar, though perhaps smaller scale, phenomena occurred in a remote area somewhere a few hundred miles from Nephite territory, they likely would not have seen, felt, or heard the explosion. In the Tunguska event, the falling object was seen as “a bright bluish-white light in the sky” from 600 miles away. See Waston, “The Tunguska Event,” 7. Such a sight by Nephite astronomers could have been understood as one of the “great lights in heaven” or the “many signs and

wonders in heaven” foretold by Samuel. Mormon does assure readers that there were other signs leading up to the night without darkness, which nonetheless failed to persuade detractors (3 Nephi 1:4–5).

22. Kimberly M. Berkey, “Temporality and Fulfillment in 3 Nephi 1,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24 (2015): 74.
23. See John 1:4–5; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46; Mosiah 16:9; Alma 38:9; 3 Nephi 9:18; 11:11; Ether 4:12; Doctrine and Covenants 10:70; 11:28; 12:9; 34:2; 39:2; 45:7; 93:2; 103:9.
24. Neal A. Maxwell, “In Him All Things Hold Together,” *BYU Speeches*, March 31, 1991, online at [speeches.byu.edu](http://speeches.byu.edu).
25. Maxwell, “In Him All Things Hold Together.”
26. Neal A. Maxwell, “Encircled in the Arms of His Love,” *Ensign*, November 2002, online at [lds.org](http://lds.org).

## WHY DOES MORMON STATE THAT ‘ANGELS DID APPEAR UNTO WISE MEN’?

1. Book of Mormon Central, “What Does the Virgin Mary Have to Do with the Tree of Life? (1 Nephi 11:18),” *KnoWhy* 13 (January 18, 2016).
2. Book of Mormon Central, “Why Does an Angel Reveal the Name of Christ to Jacob? (2 Nephi 10:3),” *KnoWhy* 36 (February 18, 2016).
3. There is an interesting parallel here with the “wise men” that followed the star to Christ’s birthplace in Matthew 2:1–12. According to some early Christian traditions, the “star” that “went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was” (Matthew 2:9) was actually an angel (angels are often associated with stars in the literature). See Dale C. Allison, *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 17–41.
4. See Book of Mormon Central, “How Were the Amlicites and Amalekites Related? (Alma 2:11),” *KnoWhy* 109 (May 27, 2016).
5. This is an emended rendering of the verse, as found in Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 356.

## WHY DIDN’T NEPHI MENTION MARY’S NAME?

1. See Matthew Bowen, “‘Most Desirable Above All Things’: Onomastic Play on Mary and Mormon in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 13 (2015): 33–34. As far as the technical derivation of this name and its general acceptance as being derived from an Egyptian root, Bowen explained, “The name “Mary” (from “Miriam”; New Testament “Mariam” or “Maria”) still makes best sense as an Egyptian theophoric hypocoristic, deriving from the Egyptian root *mr(i)* or *mry* which as a verb means to “love, ... want, wish, desire” and as a noun (*mr[.wt]*) means “love, ... will, desire,” rather than as a derivation from Mara, “bitter” from Ruth 1:20. “Mary” or “Miriam” in Egyptian, like David in Hebrew, means “Beloved,” i.e., “beloved of the god.” James K. Hoffmeier writes: “Although there are many linguistic explanations for the final mem [m in Miriam/Mariam], there is agreement that *mary* is the proposed writing of the root *mry*, meaning ‘love’ or ‘beloved.’”” In Judeo-Aramaic, Mary’s name would have been Maryam, which was thought in antiquity to mean “rebellion,” “bitter sea,” “mistress,” “exalted one,” “ruling one,” or “beautiful.” See “Miriam (given name),” online at [wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org), accessed June 5, 2019.
2. Bowen noted that water “of course, is a powerful symbol both of birth and rebirth.” Bowen, “‘Most Desirable Above All Things,’” 40. Thus, like the Tree of Life, the Waters of Life could symbolically relate to Mary’s role to give birth to the Son of God.
3. See Book of Mormon Central, “What Does the Virgin Mary Have to Do with the Tree of Life? (1 Nephi 11:18),” *KnoWhy* 13 (January 18, 2016).

4. Bowen explained, “if the terms ‘love’ and ‘desire’ appear in Egyptian language on the plates, both words would almost certainly be written as forms of mr(i), thus literally placing her name in the text. . . . Even the use of the Hebrew equivalents of the terms ‘love’ and ‘desire’ would cognitively revolve around the appearance of ‘the mother of God’ in Nephi’s text.” Bowen, “‘Most Desirable Above All Things,’” 39.
5. Bowen, “‘Most Desirable Above All Things,’” 39.
6. The description of the fruit of the Tree of Life as being “most desirable” seems to be connected to the gift of charity, which Mormon described as being “greatest of all” (Moroni 7:46). Notably, it has also been proposed that Mary may mean “gift (of God).” Koehler, Ludwig, and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 5 vols. revised by W. Baumgartner and Johann J. Stamm (Leiden: Brill, 1994, trans. of 5-volume 3rd German edition) 635–636; as cited in “Mary,” Book of Mormon Onomasticon, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson, accessed June 5, 2019, online at onoma.lib.byu.edu. This possibility is interesting considering that 1 Nephi 15:36 describes the fruit of the Tree of Life as “the greatest of all the *gifts* of God” (emphasis added).
7. Mary F. Foulger, “Motherhood and the Family,” *Ensign*, November 1980, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.
8. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1979), 1:327.
9. If “the worth of souls is great in the sight of God,” (Doctrine and Covenants 18:10), then the calling to bring forth God’s precious spirit children into mortality must also be of great worth.

## DID THE NEPHITES HAVE A “HOLIDAY SEASON” LIKE WE DO TODAY?

1. See Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 159.
2. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 150.
3. Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 159.
4. Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 159.
5. Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 159.
6. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 164.
7. Emphasis added. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 164.
8. Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 168–169.
9. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 167–168.
10. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 170.
11. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 170.
12. See Eldin Ricks’s *Thorough Concordance of the LDS Standard Works* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1995), 619–620.
13. For more on this, as well as other possible reasons for this stress on kingship, see Book of Mormon Central, “Why is the Theme of Kingship So Prominent in King Benjamin’s Speech? (Mosiah 1:10),” *KnoWhy* 79 (April 15, 2016); Neal Rappleye, “King Noah and Maya Kingship,” at *Studio et Quoque Fide: A Blog on Latter-day Saint Apologetics, Scholarship, and Commentary*, August 21, 2016, online at studioetquoquefide.com; Lee L. Donaldson, “Benjamin and Noah: The Principle of Dominion” in *Mosiah, Salvation Only Through Christ*, Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 5, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1991), 49–58.
14. Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 170–171.
15. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 172–173.

16. See Book of Mormon Central, “Why Does King Benjamin Emphasize the Blood of Christ? (Mosiah 4:2),” *KnoWhy* 82 (April 20, 2016).
17. See Mosiah 3:11, 15, 16, 18, 19; 4:6–7. For more on this, see Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 174.
18. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 176.
19. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 176.
20. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 176.
21. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 176–177.
22. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 177.
23. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 177.
24. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 177–178.
25. See Book of Mormon Central, “Why Did the Nephites Stay in Their Tents During King Benjamin’s Speech? (Mosiah 2:6),” *KnoWhy* 80 (April 18, 2016); John A. Tvednes, “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, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:197–237.
26. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 184.
27. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 184.
28. It seems that these tents were more than just a place to stay while the people were gathering to listen to Benjamin’s speech. Szink and Welch have noted that “Everyone had a tent, not just those who had come from out of town and needed a place to stay. Furthermore, they all remained in their tents during the speech, surely for ceremonial reasons. If it had not been religiously and ritually important for them to stay in their tents, the crowd could have stood much closer to Benjamin and been able to hear him, obviating the need for written copies of his words to be prepared and circulated (see Mosiah 2:8). Apparently Benjamin considered it more important for the people to remain in their tents than to have them stand within close hearing distance of the speaker.” See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 185–186.
29. Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 185.
30. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 187.
31. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 187. See also Mosiah 5:1–7; compare Exodus 19:5; Jeremiah 31:33; Nehemiah 7:73–8:18; 9:1–13:31.
32. Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 188.
33. Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 188.
34. See Szink and Welch, “An Ancient Israelite Festival Context,” 160.

## WHY DID THE WISE MEN GIVE JESUS GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH?

1. “Strata: The Magi’s Gifts—Tribute or Treatment?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 38, no. 1 (2012): 24.
2. “The Magi’s Gifts,” 24.
3. “The Magi’s Gifts,” 24.
4. “The Magi’s Gifts,” 24. For more on Myrrh, see Roland K. Harrison, “Myrrh” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 3:450–451.
5. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 9:510.
6. See Book of Mormon Central, “Why Does an Angel Reveal the Name of Christ to Jacob? (2 Nephi 10:3),” *KnoWhy* 36 (February 18, 2016).



7. See Stephen D. Ricks, “Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6,” in *King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom”*, ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 265.
8. For more on Christ as the High Priest, see Matthew Grey’s presentation, “‘Jesus Blessed Them . . . and His Countenance Did Shine Upon Them’: Understanding Third Nephi 19 in Light of the Priestly Blessing,” given at the September 2008 conference, “Third Nephi: New Perspectives on an Incomparable Scripture,” held at Brigham Young University. The brief summary of the presentation can be found in “Scholars Focus Conference on Third Nephi,” *Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship* 28, no. 6 (2008): 3–4.
9. *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 628–633.
10. *Eldin Ricks’s Thorough Concordance of the LDS Standard Works* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1995), 546.
11. For another priestly function Christ performed in the Book of Mormon, see Book of Mormon Central, “Why Did Jesus Allude to the Priestly Blessing in Numbers 6? (3 Nephi 19:25),” *KnoWhy* 212 (October 19, 2016).
12. For more on this, see Book of Mormon Central, “Why Does Abinadi Use the Phrase ‘The Bands of Death’? (Mosiah 15:8),” *KnoWhy* 93 (May 5, 2016).
13. See Daniel K. Judd, “The Spirit of Christ: A Light Amidst the Darkness,” in *Fourth Nephi Through Moroni, From Zion to Destruction*, Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 9, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1995), 133–134.
14. For more on Christ’s conquest over evil, see Robert J. Matthews, “Two Ways in the World: The Warfare Between God and Satan,” in *The Book of Mormon, Part 1: 1 Nephi to Alma 29*, Studies in Scripture: Volume 7, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1987), 146–161.
15. Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 6 (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 1988), 162–163.
16. See Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 2:39.
17. See Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1987–1992), 1:192–193.
18. See Robert J. Matthews, “Jesus Christ” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis Largey (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003), 452–453.
19. Gary P. Gillum, “Christology,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1992), 1:272–273.

## WHY DOES THE BOOK OF MORMON TALK ABOUT A “LAND OF JERUSALEM”?

1. See 1 Nephi, headnote; 1 Nephi 2:11; 3:9–10; 5:6; 7:2, 7; 16:35; 17:14, 20, 22; 18:24; 2 Nephi 1:1, 3, 9, 30; 25:11; Jacob 2:25, 31–32; Omni 1:6; Mosiah 1:11; 2:4; 7:20; 10:12; Alma 3:11; 9:22; 10:3; 22:9; 36:29; Helaman 5:6; 7:7; 8:21; 16:19; 3 Nephi 5:20; 16:1; 20:29; Mormon 3:18–19; and Ether 13:7. Alma 24:1 uses the phrase in reference to a new land called Jerusalem by later Lamanites.
2. Origen Bachelet, *Mormonism Exposed Internally and Externally* (New York, NY: 1838), 14.
3. For the most complete discussion of the expression “land of Jerusalem” from an ancient Near Eastern perspective, see Daniel C. Peterson, Matthew Roper, and William J. Hamblin, “On Alma 7:10 and the Birthplace of Jesus Christ” (FARMS Papers, 1995).

4. See W. F. Albright, trans., “The Amarna Letters,” in *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 437–440. For the most relevant excerpts, see Neal Rappleye, “Letters of ‘Abdi-Heba of Jerusalem (EA 285–290),” *Nephite History in Context 2* (December 2017): 7. For the most recent edition of the Amarna Letters, see Anson F. Rainey, trans., *The El-Amarna Correspondence: A New Edition of the Cuneiform Letters from the Site of El Amarna based on Collations of all Extant Tablets*, 2 vols., ed. William Schniedewind and Zipora Cochavi-Rainey (Boston, MA: Brill, 2015). For Hugh Nibley’s work on this, see Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert/The Word of the Jaredites/There Were Jaredites*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 5 (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 6–7; Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 6 (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 100–102.
5. For background on the Amarna Letters, see Richard S. Hess, “Amarna Letters,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 50–51; Nadav Na’aman, “Amarna Letters,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols., ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Double Day, 1992), 1:174–181.
6. Albright, “The Amarna Letters,” 438, emphasis added. See also Rainey, *El-Amarna Correspondence*, 1113: “Look, the king has established his name in the land of Jerusalem forever and he simply cannot abandon it, viz. the city state of Jerusalem.” William L. Moran, ed. and trans., *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 328: “As the king has placed his name in Jerusalem forever, he cannot abandon it—the land of Jerusalem.”
7. See Kipp Davis, *The Cave 4 Apocryphon of Jeremiah and the Qumran Jeremianic Traditions: Prophetic Persona and the Construction of Community Identity* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2014), 132, emphasis added. For the relevant excerpt, see Neal Rappleye, “Apocryphon of Jeremiah (4Q385a),” *Nephite History in Context 2* (December 2017): 2.
8. See Rappleye, “Apocryphon of Jeremiah (4Q385a),” 2–3.
9. Nadav Na’aman, “Josiah and the Kingdom of Judah,” in *Good Kings and Bad Kings: The Kingdom of Judah in the Seventh Century BCE*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2005), 198–199. See also Robert F. Smith, “The Land of Jerusalem: The Place of Jesus’ Birth,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 170–172.
10. Yigal Moyal and Avraham Faust, “Jerusalem’s Hinterland in the Eighth-Seventh Centuries BCE: Towns, Villages, Farmsteads, and Royal Estates,” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 147, no. 4 (2015): 284: “Those farmsteads, along with the other rural settlements, distributed their agricultural surplus to the nearby towns, and mainly to Jerusalem. The latter, naturally, served as an administrative, social, and religious centre for the entire region.”
11. Moyal and Faust, “Jerusalem’s Hinterland,” 284. Jeremiah’s expression “Jerusalem and all its cities” (Jeremiah 34:1 NRSV) seems to reflect this situation.
12. Yuval Gadot, “In the Valley of the King: Jerusalem’s Rural Hinterland in the 8th–4th Centuries BCE,” *Tel Aviv: Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University* 42, no. 1 (2015): 17–18.
13. Robert Eisenman and Michael Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered: The First Complete Translation and Interpretation of 50 Key Documents withheld for over 35 Years* (Rockport, MA: Element, 1992), 57.
14. See Gordon C. Thomasson, “Revisiting the Land of Jerusalem,” in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 139–141.
15. Albright, “Amarna Letters,” 440 n.15. While others have disputed this connection, many biblical scholars still accept the identification. See, for example, Markus Bockmuehl, *This Jesus: Martyr, Lord, Messiah* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2004), 25; Eugen J. Pentiu, *Jesus*

- the Messiah in the Hebrew Bible* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006), 137 n.67; Denis Baly, “Bethlehem,” in *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, rev. and updated, ed. Mark Allen Powell (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011), 92; Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *Keys to Jerusalem: Collected Essays* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5.
16. See Ronny Reich, “A Fiscal Bulla from the City of David,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 62, no. 2 (2012): 200–205; Martin Heide, “Some Notes on the Epigraphical Features of the Phoenician and Hebrew Fiscal Bullae,” in *Recording New Epigraphic Evidence: Essays in Honor of Robert Deutsch on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. Meir Lubetski and Edith Lubetski (Jerusalem: Leshon Limudim, 2015), 72. See also Neal Rappleye, “Bethlehem Bulla,” *Nephite History in Context* 2 (December 2017): 14–17.
17. See Neal Rappleye, “Why Did Alma Say Christ Would Be Born in Jerusalem? Surprising Evidence of the Book of Mormon,” *LDS Living*, December 21, 2017, online at [ldsiving.org](http://ldsiving.org).

## IMAGE CITATIONS

Page 1: The Virgin Mary and the Christ Child. Image via Adobe Stock

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Page 9: Mary the mother of Jesus depicted as the Tree of Life

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