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## Another Testament of Jesus Christ

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## ANOTHER TESTAMENT OF JESUS CHRIST

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Robert L. Millet

**T**he Prophet Joseph Smith stated in 1841 that a man could get “nearer to God by abiding by” the precepts of the Book of Mormon “than by any other book.”<sup>1</sup> Those who have made the Book of Mormon more than casual reading know of the truthfulness of the Prophet’s declaration; they can testify with President Ezra Taft Benson that the serious study of this sacred volume can bring “spiritual and intellectual unity to [one’s] whole life.”<sup>2</sup> The Book of Mormon has been preserved and prepared with our day in mind. Prophets and noble men who wrote on the plates knew of our day, sensed and saw our challenges, and were fully aware of the sublime strength that the Nephite/Jaredite record could be in a troubled and uncertain world (see Mormon 8:35; 9:30). The Book of Mormon has been given to bring men and women to Christ—to point them toward the reality of his existence, to bear witness of his divine Sonship, and to demonstrate how the peace which comes through a remis-

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sion of sins here and the ultimate peace through salvation hereafter are to be had through calling on his holy name, and in no other way. The Book of Mormon brings men to Christ because it is a masterful revelation of him, an additional witness (with the New Testament) that he "hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10). It is indeed "another testament of Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup>

## The Need for Another Testament

In a revelation given at the time of the organization of the restored Church, the Lord explained that the Book of Mormon had been given for the purpose of "proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true" (D&C 20:11). Presumably the expression *the holy scriptures* refers to the Bible. That is to say, the Nephite record has been delivered to this final dispensation to establish the truthfulness of the biblical record, or, in the words of Mormon, "this [the Book of Mormon] is written for the intent that [we] might believe that [the Bible]" (Mormon 7:9). The Book of Mormon establishes clearly that the Bible is the "book of the Lamb of God" (1 Nephi 13:28); that Old and New Testament characters like Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, John the Baptist, and John the Beloved were real persons through whom God fulfilled his purposes; that the miracles and wonders described in the Bible (for example, crossing the Red Sea, healings through looking upon the brazen serpent, displacing the Canaanites from the promised land) are genuine manifestations of divine power.

Most important, the Book of Mormon attests that Jehovah, the God of ancient Israel, truly became the Son of the Highest; that Jesus of Nazareth came to earth through birth and took upon himself a physical body; that he submitted to the throes and pains of mortality; and that he lived a sinless life, took upon him the sins of all mankind on conditions of repentance, was crucified, died, and rose again three days later into glorious immortality. In other words, the Book of Mormon is another testament of the *gospel*, the glad tidings that deliverance from death and hell and endless torment is available through the infinite atonement and by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel. (See 3 Nephi 27:13–21.)

In a time when men are eager to acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as a great teacher, as a model of morality and decency,

and as the prototype of purity and peaceful living—but who in the same breath deny his divinity—the prophets of the Book of Mormon boldly declare that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God; that he has power to forgive sins, power over life and death, and that as the Holy One of Israel he is the “keeper of the gate,” the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead. It has become fashionable among some biblical scholars during the last century to undertake the “quest for the historical Jesus,” seeking through form-critical methods to peel away the traditions of the centuries concerning the God-Man until they would arrive, as some suppose, at a simple picture of the lowly Nazarene. However, in the words of F. F. Bruce: “Perhaps the most important result to which Form Criticism points is that, no matter how far back we may press our researches into the roots of the gospel story, no matter how we classify the gospel material, we never arrive at a non-supernatural Jesus.”<sup>4</sup> The Book of Mormon saves us “the quest.” It attests that Jesus was God before he came to earth and the promised Messiah and Savior on earth.

### Lehi and Nephi: A Remarkable Vision

Some time after Nephi and his brothers had returned from their journey to Jerusalem to get Ishmael and his family, Lehi announced: “I have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision” (1 Nephi 8:2). In the words of a modern Apostle, “All inspired dreams are visions, but all visions are not dreams. Visions are received in hours of wakefulness or of sleep and in some cases when the recipient has passed into a trance; it is only when the vision occurs during sleep that it is termed a dream.”<sup>5</sup> Lehi, a visionary man and designated prophet of God, declared that he had been the recipient of a prophetic revelation. The dream, which most Latter-day Saints have read numerous times, is a literary masterpiece and a doctrinal gem. In a personal way, the dream provided Lehi with a forum for family instruction: the great patriarch expressed deep concern that his elder sons, Laman and Lemuel, would not pay the price sufficient to press forward on the strait and narrow path which led to the tree of life, and thus would never know of the consummate joys associated with full participation in the plan of the Father (1 Nephi 8:3–4, 12–18).

In a more general way, the dream provided a vivid description of four main groups of people, types and representations of

all walks of life, persons with varying spiritual aptitudes and diverse degrees of sensitivity toward things of righteousness. This part of the dream (1 Nephi 8:21–33) might well be called the parable of the path. It has fascinating similarities to the parable of the soils in the New Testament (Matthew 13:3–8, 18–23), and stresses the differences in spiritual receptivity. According to Lehi's vision, to navigate the path and arrive securely at the tree of life, one was required to hold tenaciously to the rod (word of God), pass safely through the mists of darkness (temptations of the devil), avoid detours from the path which might lead to the waters of filthiness (depths of hell) beneath the path,<sup>6</sup> and ignore the taunting voices of ridicule of those situated in the great and spacious building (the pride and wisdom of the world).

Nephi explained that he was desirous to "see, and hear, and know" of the same things which his father had experienced in vision. Knowing full well that God was no respecter of persons, that the Almighty constantly reveals the things of eternity to those who seek him in faithfulness and in truth, and, in his own words, "believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me, as I sat pondering in mine heart I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain, which I never had before seen, and upon which I never had before set my foot." (1 Nephi 10:17–11:1.) Mountains are frequently the meetingplaces between God and men; they serve as nature's temples, the point of intersection between the finite and the infinite. As is so often the case, Nephi's meditation upon the things of the Spirit resulted in a heavenly manifestation (cf. D&C 76:11–19; 138:1–11); he received the same vision his father had received.

Nephi's rendition of his vision, given to us in 1 Nephi 11–14, is obviously a much more extensive account than that which Lehi delivered in 1 Nephi 8. It is a vision not only of the tree of life, but also a glimpse of the future destiny of the world, a vision not unlike that given to the brother of Jared, Enoch, Moses, and John the Revelator. And yet, Nephi himself explained to us later: "I, Nephi, am forbidden that I should write the remainder of the things which I saw and heard; wherefore the things which I have written sufficeth me; and I have written but a small part of the things which I saw. *And I bear record that I saw the things which my father saw, and the angel of the Lord did make them known unto me.*" (1 Nephi 14:28–29, italics added.) Nephi's words, spoken here at the end of the vision, seem to

imply not simply that his vision comprehended or circumscribed that of his father's (and thus he had seen what his father saw *and much more*), but rather that they had beheld the same vision. Let us note here that Nephi had earlier observed (1 Nephi 1:16–17) that the opening chapters of the small plates would be devoted to an abridgment of some of his father's experiences (now chapters 1–8), while he would soon come to devote the remainder of his record to an account of his own life (see, for example, 1 Nephi 10:1). Lehi spoke “all the words of his dream or vision” to his family, “which,” Nephi hastened to add, “*were many*” (1 Nephi 8:36; italics added). In 1 Nephi 8, therefore, we are introduced to the vision of the tree of life, an obvious abridgment of Lehi's much lengthier spiritual experience. We turn, however, to subsequent chapters—chapters 11, 12, and 15—for Nephi's commentary and explanation of the vision and the specific symbolism involved.

### Nephi's Guides in the Vision

Having been caught away to a high mountain for instruction, Nephi was asked by a personage whom he calls “the Spirit”: “What desirest thou?” Nephi answered promptly: “I desire to behold the things which my father saw.” (1 Nephi 11:1–3.) Then followed a series of questions, answers, and visual explanations to the young Nephite seer. Having been shown the vision of the tree, the same which Lehi had beheld, Nephi was asked, “What desirest thou?” to which he responded, “To know the interpretation thereof—for I spake unto him as a man speaketh; for *I beheld that he was in the form of a man; yet nevertheless, I knew that it was the Spirit of the Lord; and he spake unto me as a man speaketh with another*” (1 Nephi 11:9–11, italics added). One is faced right away with an interesting theological question: is Nephi's guide, designated by him as “the Spirit of the Lord,” the premortal Christ (the individual spirit personage who became Jesus Christ in mortality) or the Holy Ghost?

If this is a personal appearance of the Holy Ghost to a man, it is indeed a singular occasion, so far as our scriptural accounts are concerned.<sup>7</sup> In addressing this issue some years ago, Sidney B. Sperry suggested the latter alternative—that the “Spirit of the Lord” was the Holy Ghost—based upon the following textual evidence.<sup>8</sup> First, we read of Nephi's desires (in the preceding chapter) to “see, and hear, and know of these things, *by the*

*power of the Holy Ghost.*" He further testified that the Holy Ghost gave authority for his words. (See 1 Nephi 10:17–22, italics added.) Second, Nephi used phrases like "the Spirit said," "the Spirit cried," and "I said unto the Spirit" (verses 2, 4, 6, 8, 9), all of which sound very much like reference to the Holy Ghost rather than Jehovah. Third, Nephi never spoke of the Lord Jesus Christ as the "Spirit of the Lord" when the Master appeared to him on other occasions (1 Nephi 2:16; 2 Nephi 11:2–3). Fourth, the phrase *Spirit of the Lord* occurs some forty times in the Book of Mormon, and in every case reference seems to be to either the Holy Ghost or the Light of Christ. Examples of this would be 1 Nephi 1:12, where Lehi, having read from the book delivered to him, was filled with the "Spirit of the Lord"; 1 Nephi 13:15, where the "Spirit of the Lord" was poured out upon the Gentiles in preparation for the establishment of the American nation; Mosiah 4:3, where the "Spirit of the Lord" came upon the people of King Benjamin and they experienced a remission of sins and its subsequent joy; and, of course, those references wherein the expression *Spirit of the Lord* is used after the mortal ministry of Jesus Christ, places where these words could only mean the Holy Ghost (for example, Mormon 2:26; 5:16; Moroni 9:4). "The Holy Ghost undoubtedly possesses personal powers and affections," Elder James E. Talmage has written. "These attributes exist in Him in perfection. . . . That the Spirit of the Lord is capable of manifesting Himself in the form and figure of man," Elder Talmage continued, "is indicated by the wonderful interview between the Spirit and Nephi, in which He revealed Himself to the prophet, questioned him concerning his desires and belief, instructed him in the things of God, speaking face to face with the man."

After explaining to the Holy Ghost that he sought the meaning behind the representation of the tree of life, Nephi "looked as if to look upon" the Spirit, "and [he] saw him not; for he had gone from before [his] presence" (1 Nephi 11:12). Nephi was then caught away into vision again, this time beholding many of the cities of the Holy Land, specifically Nazareth of Galilee. The heavens were opened to Nephi and "an angel came down and stood before" him. This angel, whose identity is not given, became Nephi's guide and instructor throughout the remainder of his panoramic vision, providing both prophetic sight and doctrinal insight into such future matters as the coming of Jesus Christ to both hemispheres; the formation of the great and

abominable church; the journey of Columbus and the establishment of the American nation under divine direction; the plain and precious truths taken away and kept back from the Bible; the spread of the great and abominable church and the church of the Lamb to all nations of the earth; and the winding up scenes preparatory to the coming of the Lord in glory.

## The Condescension of God

Nephi's attention was drawn specifically to Nazareth of Galilee. There he "beheld a virgin, and she was exceedingly fair and white."<sup>10</sup> The angel then asked Nephi a penetrating question: "Knowest thou the condescension of God?" (1 Nephi 11:13–16.) To condescend is literally to "go down with" or to "go down among." It is "the act of descending to a lower and less dignified state; or waiving the privileges of one's rank and status; of bestowing honors and favors upon one of lesser stature or status."<sup>11</sup> The angel's question might be restated thus: "Nephi, do you fathom the majesty of it all? Can your mortal mind comprehend the infinite wonder and grandeur of the marvelous love made manifest by the Father and the Son?" Nephi answered: "I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things" (1 Nephi 11:17). One of the remarkable discoveries of those who come to know him who is Eternal is that God's infinity as the Almighty does not preclude either his immediacy or his intimacy as a loving Father of spirits. Enoch learned this precious lesson during his ministry (see Moses 7:28–32), and Nephi evidenced his knowledge of the same principles.

The "condescension of God" described in 1 Nephi 11 seems to be twofold: the condescension of God the Father (verses 16–23) and the condescension of God the Son (verses 24–36). "Without overstepping the bounds of propriety by saying more than is appropriate," Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written, "let us say this: God the Almighty; the Maker and Preserver and Upholder of all things; the Omnipotent One . . . elects, in his fathomless wisdom, to beget a Son, an Only Son, the Only Begotten in the flesh. God, who is infinite and immortal, condescends to step down from his throne, to join with one who is finite and mortal in bringing forth, 'after the manner of the flesh,' the Mortal Messiah."<sup>12</sup> In the words of President Ezra Taft Benson, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints



proclaims that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the most literal sense. The body in which He performed His mission in the flesh was sired by that same Holy Being we worship as God, our Eternal Father. Jesus was not the son of Joseph, nor was He begotten by the Holy Ghost. He is the Son of the Eternal Father!"<sup>13</sup>

The condescension of God the Son consists in the coming to earth of the great Jehovah, the Lord God Omnipotent, the God of the ancients. The 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon contains the following words from the angel to Nephi: "Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the *mother of God*, after the manner of the flesh" (1 Nephi 11:18; italics added). The angel later said unto Nephi regarding the vision of the Christ child: "Behold the Lamb of God, yea, *the Eternal Father!*" (1 Nephi 11:21; italics added; cf. 1 Nephi 13:40, 1830 edition). Later in the same vision of the ministry of Christ, the angel spoke, saying: "Look! And I looked," Nephi added, "and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, *the everlasting God* was judged of the world; and I saw and bear record" (1 Nephi 11:32; italics added). In the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith the Prophet changed these verses to read "the mother of *the Son of God*," "the *Son of the Eternal Father*," and "the *Son of the everlasting God*," respectively. It would appear that the Prophet made these textual alterations to assist the Latter-day Saints in fully understanding the meaning of the expressions.<sup>14</sup>

Critics of the Church or myopic historians are eager to point up these changes as illustrative of Joseph Smith's changing views on the doctrine of the Godhead, an example of pre- and post-1835 theology; some would suppose that Joseph was tied to a type of "trinitarianism" before his theology "developed" over time, and would thus place (inappropriately) the Book of Mormon within that developmental process. Such a conclusion is both unwarranted and incorrect. For one thing, the Book of Mormon writers make scores of references to the distinct identities of Jesus Christ and his Father.<sup>15</sup> One need only read Nephi's words in 2 Nephi 25, regarding the necessity of the Jews believing in Christ and worshipping the Father in his name (verse 16) to appreciate the distinctness of the members of the Godhead in the minds of Nephite prophets. In addition, in 2 Nephi 31 we note the constant reference to the "words of the Father" as opposed to the "words of the Son." In our chapter now under consideration (1 Nephi 11), we read in verse 24 (italics added) these words: "And I looked, and I beheld *the Son of God* going forth among

the children of men; and I saw many fall down at his feet and worship him" (see also verse 7; Alma 5:50). The Prophet Joseph Smith's alterations in previous verses—mother of *the Son of God* and the *Son of the Eternal Father*—are perfectly consistent with the description of Christ in verse 24.<sup>16</sup>

Mary was indeed the "mother of God," and Jesus Christ was the "Eternal Father," the "everlasting God" (cf. Mosiah 15:4; 16:15; Alma 11:38–39). The condescension of God the Son thus consists in the fact that the Eternal One would "descend from his throne divine" (*Hymns*, 1985, no. 193), be born in the most humble of circumstances, become among the most helpless of all creation—a human infant—and submit to the refining influences of mortal life. An angel further explained the condescension of God the Son to King Benjamin: "The time cometh, and is not far distant," he prophesied, "that with power, 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, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay." Further, Jehovah, the God of creation, "shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death." (Mosiah 3:5, 7.) The condescension of the Son—his ministry among the unenlightened, his suffering and death, followed by the persecution and death of his anointed servants—is described by Nephi in 1 Nephi 11:27–36.

Inextricably tied to the concept of the Incarnation, of the condescension of the Great God, is the awful irony of the suffering and atonement of our Lord. He who was sinless was persecuted and put to death by sinners whom he came to save. He who was sinless became, as it were, the great sinner. In Paul's words, God the Father has "made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21). He who deserved least of all to suffer suffered most—more than mortal mind can fathom. He who had brought light and life—the more abundant life (John 10:10)—was rejected by the powers of darkness and death. As Joseph Smith taught the members of the School of the Prophets in Kirtland, Jesus Christ is called the *Son of God* because he "descended in suffering below that which man can suffer; or, in other words, suffered greater sufferings, and was exposed to more powerful contradictions than any man can be."<sup>17</sup> All this Nephi saw in vision, including the persecution and deaths of the Twelve Apostles after the crucifixion and ascension of the Master (1 Nephi 11:24–36).

## The Tree of Life

After Nephi had explained that he desired to see the things his father had seen, the Spirit asked what appears, at first blush, to be a most unusual question: "Believest thou that thy father saw the tree of which he hath spoken?" Nephi answered the query: "Yea, thou knowest that I believe all the words of my father." (1 Nephi 11:3-5.) One wonders about the Spirit's question: why did the angel not ask Nephi if he believed that his father had seen a large and spacious building, or mists of darkness, or a strait and narrow path, or a rod of iron? The fact is, faith is not exercised in trees, and the Spirit of the Lord was not simply inquiring into Nephi's knowledge of a form of plant life. Indeed, it was not a belief in the tree which would qualify Nephi for the manifestation to follow; nor was this the concern of the Spirit. The tree was obviously a doctrinal symbol, a "sign" which pointed beyond itself to an even greater reality. Yet the tree was of marvelous importance, for it was the symbol, even from the time of the Edenic paradise, of the central and saving role of Jesus Christ and the glorified immortality to be enjoyed by the faithful through his atoning sacrifice. Nephi's vision was to be more than an involvement with an abstract concept called the "love of God" (1 Nephi 11:22); it was a messianic message, a poignant prophecy of him toward whom all men press forward on that strait and narrow path which leads to life eternal.

"My soul delighteth in proving unto my people," Nephi would later say, "the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and *all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him*" (2 Nephi 11:4; italics added; compare Moses 6:63). In reference to this verse, Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written: "It follows that if we had sufficient insight, we would see in every gospel ordinance, in every rite that is part of revealed religion, in every performance commanded of God, in all things Deity gives his people, something that typifies the eternal ministry of the Eternal Christ."<sup>16</sup> It is just so with the vision enjoyed by Lehi and Nephi: it is Christ-centered and to be fully appreciated only by focusing attention upon him who is the author of salvation. Consider the following:

1. After Nephi had certified his belief in the fact that his father saw the tree, the Spirit "cried with a loud voice, saying:

Hosanna to the Lord, the most high God; for he is God over all the earth, yea, even above all. And *blessed art thou, Nephi, because thou believest in the Son of the most high God*; wherefore, thou shalt behold the things which thou hast desired.” (1 Nephi 11:6; italics added.) Note that the angel rejoiced over Nephi’s *faith in Christ*, not simply in his belief in a tree.

2. The words of the Spirit continue: “And behold this thing shall be given unto thee for *a sign*, that after thou hast beheld *the tree* which bore the fruit which thy father tasted, thou shalt also behold *a man* descending out of heaven, and him shall ye witness; and after ye have witnessed him ye shall bear record that *it is the Son of God*” (1 Nephi 11:7; italics added). The Spirit here began to unfold the typology to Nephi. The tree has been given, “for a sign,” as a symbolic representation of a man, even he whose branches provide sacred shade and shelter from the scorching rays of sin and ignorance.
3. Consider Nephi’s description of the tree: “The beauty thereof was far beyond, yea, exceeding of all beauty; and the whiteness thereof did exceed the whiteness of the driven snow” (1 Nephi 11:8). Whiteness generally symbolizes purity. Jesus of Nazareth was the purest of pure, for he lived without spot or blemish, the only mortal to achieve moral perfection through never wandering from the path of righteousness (see 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22).
4. After Nephi had been asked concerning his knowledge of the condescension of God and had then seen Mary “carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time,” he “looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms.” Nephi’s account continues: “And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! *Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?*” That is, while looking at the Christ child, it is as if the angel were summing up, bringing Nephi back to the point where he had begun—the deeper significance of the tree. Essentially Nephi was asked, “Now, Nephi, do you finally understand the meaning of the tree? Now do you

understand the message behind the sign?" And he answered: "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." The angel then added by way of confirmation: "Yea, and the most joyous to the soul." (1 Nephi 11:19–23; italics added.) Nephi's answer was perfect: it was an understanding given by the power of the Holy Ghost. Again, the tree represented more than an abstract emotion, more than a vague (albeit divine) sentiment. It was the greatest manifestation of the love of God—the gift of Christ. "For God so loved the world," Jesus explained to Nicodemus, "that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). That love is made manifest and is extended to all men through the atonement—it "*sheddeth* itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men"—through, appropriately, the blood *shed* in Gethsemane and on Golgotha.<sup>19</sup>

There is no ceiling to the number of saved beings, no limit to the love of the Father which can be received by all who qualify for the fulness of salvation. "And again," Moroni spoke to the Savior, "I remember that thou hast said that thou hast loved the world, even unto the laying down of thy life for the world." Continuing, Moroni added, "And now I know that this love which thou hast had for the children of men is charity." (Ether 12:33–34.) Those who partake of the powers of Christ through repentance gain the blessings mentioned in regard to the people of King Benjamin. "O have mercy," they had pleaded in prayer at the conclusion of the king's mighty sermon, "and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God." As a result of their sincere petition, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience." (Mosiah 4:2–3.)

5. Finally, we attend carefully to Nephi's words regarding the tree: "And it came to pass that I beheld that the rod of iron, which my father had seen, was the word of God, which led to *the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life*; which

waters are a representation of the love of God; and I also beheld that the tree of life was a representation of the love of God" (1 Nephi 11:25; italics added). The "fountain of living waters" or "waters of life," linked to the tree of life very often in the literature of the ancient Near East (compare Revelation 22:1–2),<sup>20</sup> would seem to symbolize the cooling draft available through Him alone whose words and works are as an oasis in the desert of the world. "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst," Jesus said to the Samaritan woman; "but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). Finally, in dramatizing the sins of Judah in Lehi's day, the Lord Jehovah spoke to Jeremiah: "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken *me the fountain of living waters*, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13; italics added).

## Conclusion

It has wisely been observed that what a person thinks of Christ will largely determine what kind of a person he will be. How then could one utilize his time more profitably than by seriously studying the Book of Mormon, a book whose primary purpose is to reveal and testify of Jesus Christ? We learn from its title page that the Book of Mormon has been preserved and delivered through prophets to us in this day for "the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations" (compare 2 Nephi 26:12). True to its central theme, and with Christocentric consistency, the Nephite prophets talk of him, preach of him, prophesy of him, and rejoice in him, that all of us might know to what source we may look for a remission of our sins (see 2 Nephi 25:26). Salvation is in Christ. Of that central verity the Book of Mormon leaves no doubt. "And my soul delighteth in proving unto my people," Nephi exulted, "that save Christ should come all men must perish. For if there be no Christ there be no God; and if there be no God we are not, for there could have been no creation. *But there is a God*," Nephi boldly proclaimed, "*and he is Christ*." (2 Nephi 11:6–7; italics added.) The witness has been borne and thus the testament is in force.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976), p. 194.
2. Conference Report, April 1975, p. 97.
3. This appropriate subtitle for the Book of Mormon was announced to the Church by Boyd K. Packer in the 152nd Semiannual General Conference of the Church. See Conference Report, October 1982, p. 75.
4. F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 33.
5. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), p. 208.
6. For a discussion of the "gulf" which separated the righteous in paradise from the wicked in hell (see 1 Nephi 12:18; 15:28; 2 Nephi 1:13; Helaman 3:29), see Robert L. Millet and Joseph Fielding McConkie, *The Life Beyond* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986), pp. 21–24, 179.
7. It may be that the Holy Ghost appeared in person at the baptism of Jesus, but there is no reference to him conversing with anyone. See Matthew 3:13–17; *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 275–76.
8. Sidney B. Sperry, *Answers to Book of Mormon Questions* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967), pp. 27–30; see also Sperry's *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), pp. 116–18.
9. James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1975), pp. 159–60. See also Marion G. Romney, Conference Report, April 1974, p. 131.
10. "Can we speak too highly of her whom the Lord has blessed above all women? There was only one Christ, and there is only one Mary. Each was noble and great in preexistence, and each was foreordained to the ministry he or she performed. We cannot but think that the Father would choose the greatest female spirit to be the mother of his Son, even as he chose the male spirit like unto him to be the Savior." (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, 4 vols. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979–81], 1:326–27, n.4.)
11. Bruce R. McConkie, "Knowest Thou the Condescension of God?" *Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year*, 16 December 1969 (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1969), pp. 3–4.
12. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 1:314–15.
13. Ezra Taft Benson, *Come Unto Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983), p. 4.
14. It may also be that Joseph Smith altered these verses to make certain that no reader—member or nonmember—would confuse the Latter-day Saint understanding of the Father and the Son with that of other Christian

denominations, particularly the Roman Catholic Church. See an article by Oliver Cowdery, "Trouble in the West," in *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, I (April 1835), p. 105.

15. For a more detailed discussion on the roles of both members of the Godhead, see my paper at the First Annual Book of Mormon Symposium (1985), "The Ministry of the Father and the Son," *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987).

16. Joseph Smith spoke the following just eleven days before his death: "I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods." (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 370.)

17. *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1985), 5:2.

18. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1978), p. 378.

19. It is instructive to consider the language used in this verse: the love of God which "*sheddeth* itself abroad," instead of "*spreadeth* itself abroad," as we might expect Nephi to have said.

20. See John M. Lundquist, "The Common Temple Ideology of the Ancient Near East," in *The Temple in Antiquity*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1984), pp. 53-76.