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THE DOCTRINE OF GOD THE FATHER IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

Andrew C. Skinner

No other ancient record does what the Book of Mormon does. When it comes to testifying of Jesus as Messiah, the Book of Mormon is unparalleled. It boldly proclaims to a modern world that Jesus was the Great Jehovah before He came to earth (see 3 Nephi 15:5); that as the Messiah He was born into mortality a real flesh-and-blood being (see Mosiah 3:5–7); that He was literally the Son of God and the son of a mortal woman named Mary (see Mosiah 3:8; Alma 7:9–10); and that through His suffering and sacrifice an infinite and eternal atonement was made for all humankind (see Alma 34:8–15; 3 Nephi 11:10–15). While secular scholarship oftentimes tries to allegorize or explain away these truths, the Book of Mormon restores to both Jew and Gentile descriptions of the Atonement that were lost for centuries. And it places the Atonement at the very center of our understanding of God’s plan *and* our religion. But the Book of Mormon also does something else in a profound and unrelenting way—it stands as a pivotal witness of God the Eternal Father.

A WITNESS OF GOD THE FATHER

Perhaps we do not reflect a great deal on the notion that the Book of Mormon stands as a premier witness of God the Father. This may

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be so because we spend so much time emphasizing the Book of Mormon as a witness of Christ (and rightly so). But if we are not vigilant, we may miss the significance of the foundational corollary doctrine restored by the ancient record—the Messiah literally had a divine Father and the prophets of the Book of Mormon knew it! No matter how carefully, how often, or how long one studies the Book of Mormon, its message is constantly hammered home: Jesus the Messiah is the literal Son of God the Father, who also figures prominently in its pages. We cannot ignore this, wish it away, or twist it into something that does not square with the Prophet Joseph Smith's First Vision.

Joseph Smith translated and pondered the doctrines of the Book of Mormon through the lenses of his experience in the Sacred Grove. He said he saw and interacted with two personages, whose brightness and glory defied all description. Everything in the Book of Mormon fits perfectly with, and ultimately supports, the Prophet's experience and understanding. There is no confusion over this or shred of evidence to the contrary in the Book of Mormon. In fact, there is evidence to indicate that the Prophet Joseph Smith carefully reviewed the text of the Book of Mormon with the doctrine of the fatherhood of God specifically in mind. For example, the first edition (1830) of 1 Nephi 11:21 contained the words, "Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Eternal Father!" By the time of the 1837 edition, Joseph Smith had inserted a clarifying phrase so that the verse then read, "Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even *the Son of* the Eternal Father!" The Prophet also inserted this same clarifying phrase in verse 32 of chapter 11 so that the 1837 edition read, "And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, *the Son of* the everlasting God was judged of the world."

Without question, these two verses were doctrinally correct as they stood in the original 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. Jesus Christ is indeed the Eternal Father and the everlasting God, as is explained by the prophet Abinadi in Mosiah 15. But Joseph Smith, prophet, seer, and revelator of the Lord in this modern (and last) dispensation, also knew the doctrine of the Godhead (from firsthand experience, we might add), and also knew that the Book of Mormon

was to stand as a sure and clear witness of that doctrine *in* the latter days and *among* the Latter-day Saints. The changes he made to the texts of 1 Nephi 11:21 and 11:32 are appropriate, appreciated, and much needed in our day to clear up misunderstandings. The fundamental truth that there exists a divine Father, separate from other beings, is taught no less powerfully in the Book of Mormon than the doctrine that there exists a divine Son whom we worship as our Messiah and Savior. Therefore, let us explore two of the seminal ways in which the reality of God the Father is taught in the Book of Mormon.

NUMEROUS EXPLICIT VERSES

First of all, the doctrine of God the Father is taught in the Book of Mormon through explicit references to Jesus Christ as the Son of an Eternal Father. The language used to teach the divine sonship of Jesus is plentiful and varied, as well as obvious and subtle. He is called the Son (see 2 Nephi 31:18), the Beloved Son (see 2 Nephi 31:11), the Son of God (see 1 Nephi 10:17), the Holy Child (see Moroni 8:3), the Son of the most high God (see 1 Nephi 11:6), the Son of the living God (see Mormon 5:14), Son of our great God (see Alma 24:13), Son of the everlasting God (see 1 Nephi 11:32), Son of the Eternal Father (see 1 Nephi 11:21; 13:40), the Only Begotten of the Father (see Alma 5:48), the Only Begotten Son (see Jacob 4:5, 11; Alma 12:33), Christ the Son (see Alma 11:44), and the Son of Righteousness (see 3 Nephi 25:2). One would be hard pressed to find a more explicit and consistent list of titles that testifies of the obvious—Jesus is regarded as the Son of a divine Father.

The phrase “Son of God” alone is used fifty-one times throughout the Book of Mormon text, with variations of this phrase occurring several more times. The phrase “Only Begotten Son” is used five times, “Only Begotten of the Father” four times, and “Son of the living God” four times. The prophets Mormon and Moroni use this very powerful and expressive phrase (i.e., “Son of the living God”) always in tandem with the specific mention of the name of Jesus (see 3 Nephi 30:1; Mormon 5:14; 9:29). And Nephi uses it when discussing the baptism of Christ (see 2 Nephi 31:16).

Here are Mormon's words in describing the purpose of the doctrines and teachings of the Book of Mormon: "And behold, they shall go unto the unbelieving of the Jews; and for this intent shall they go—that they may be persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; that the Father may bring about, through his most Beloved, his great and eternal purpose, in restoring the Jews, or all the house of Israel, to the land of their inheritance, which the Lord their God hath given them, unto the fulfilling of his covenant" (Mormon 5:14).

As implied in this verse, Jesus, the earthly Messiah or Anointed One, who was the Firstborn of all of our Heavenly Father's spirit sons and daughters (see D&C 93:21), and who became the literal Son of that same divine Father, was also the designated agent of His Father's plan—the One chosen to carry out and put into effect His Father's will—all of His Father's aims and desires for this earth and the people who live upon it. This even included the Father's desire that the family known as Israel be established in lands appointed for their habitation and use while living on this earth. Thus, Abinadi could teach that the will of the Son was "swallowed up" in the will of the Father (Mosiah 15:7).

It is instructive to note that occurrences of the phrase "Son of God" often appear grouped together in certain specific chapters of the Book of Mormon which specifically focus on aspects of the Atonement. The Book of Mormon prophets understood well that the Atonement, brought about by the matchless sacrifice of God's earthly Son, was the central feature of the Father's plan for His children from the beginning. As Alma testifies, "God did call on men, in the name of his Son, (this being the plan of redemption which was laid) saying: If ye will repent, and harden not your hearts, then will I have mercy upon you, through mine Only Begotten Son" (Alma 12:33).

Those chapters where mention of the "Son of God" figures prominently include 1 Nephi 11, Alma 11, Alma 33, Alma 34, Helaman 8, and Helaman 14. In 1 Nephi 11 Nephi describes his vision of the birth and ministry of the Son of God, who was Himself God before He came to earth as a mortal being. In Alma 11 Amulek teaches that a universal resurrection comes through the Son of God. In Alma 33 Zenos and

Zenock teach that mercy is bestowed because of the Son of God. In Alma 34 Amulek teaches that the Son of God would become the great and last sacrifice, and would provide an infinite and eternal atonement for all. In Helaman 8, Nephi teaches that Abraham, Moses, Zenos, Zenock, Ezias, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lehi, and Nephi all testified that the Son of God would come to earth as the Messiah and bring salvation. And in Helaman 14 Samuel the Lamanite testifies of the mortal birth of the Son of God, who would redeem human beings from temporal and spiritual death.

Even after only a cursory reading of the Book of Mormon it becomes apparent that the most consistent and persistent teaching by Book of Mormon prophets about the Savior-Messiah is that He is the Son of God. What Amulek said specifically to one of his audiences could well be said to every soul after they have read the Book of Mormon: “My brethren, I think that it is impossible that ye should be ignorant of the things which have been spoken concerning the coming of Christ, who is taught by us to be the Son of God” (Alma 34:2).

EPISODES DESCRIBING THE FATHER AS DISTINCT FROM THE SON

The doctrine of God the Father is taught in specific, unique episodes of the Book of Mormon where the Father and the Son are described as separate divine personages. One of the most powerful and impressive of these is found in Nephi’s prophetic discourse regarding the baptism of Christ in 2 Nephi 31. Nephi was shown in vision both the ministry of John the Baptist, “that prophet . . . that should baptize the Lamb of God” (2 Nephi 31:4), as well as the actual baptismal scene of the Messiah (see 2 Nephi 31:17). The text makes clear that Nephi was also given an explicit and detailed understanding of the doctrinal basis of the ordinance of baptism and the reason for Christ’s baptism (see 2 Nephi 31:5–10). But what also comes out of a careful reading of 2 Nephi 31 is the unmistakable conclusion that Nephi had a profound understanding of, and encounter with, the Godhead. In stunning detail Nephi tells his readers that he was privileged to hear the voices of both the Father and the Son.

As a way of introducing His Son, God the Father commanded Nephi to repent “and be baptized in the name of my Beloved Son” (2 Nephi 31:11). The Son, our Savior, then told Nephi that those who would follow the Father’s command would be given the Holy Ghost, just as the Father had given the Holy Ghost to the Son (see 2 Nephi 31:12). After he presents some of his own words of exhortation, Nephi then relates how he heard the voice of the Savior a second time: “But, behold, my beloved brethren, thus came the voice of the Son unto me, saying: After ye have repented of your sins, and witnessed unto the Father that ye are willing to keep my commandments, by the baptism of water, and have received the baptism of water, and have received the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, and can speak with a new tongue, yea, even with the tongue of angels, and after this should deny me, it would have been better for you that ye had not known me” (2 Nephi 31:14).

Immediately after this instruction from the premortal Savior, Nephi again heard the voice of God the Father bearing record of His Son, in a manner that fits the pattern established and repeated in the rest of the standard works. “And I heard a voice from the Father, saying: Yea, the words of my Beloved are true and faithful. He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved” (2 Nephi 31:15). Only on certain special occasions have certain select humans on this earth had the privilege of hearing the voice of God the Father, and then it has been to hear Him introduce and bear record of His Son, who is His executor and the creator of those worlds He calls His own (see Joseph Smith Translation, John 1:19; Moses 1:31–33).¹ These special occasions include, interestingly, the actual baptism of Christ (see Matthew 3:17); the episode on the Mount of Transfiguration (see Matthew 17:5); the Savior’s appearance at the temple after His triumphal entry (see John 12:28); the Savior’s appearance in the New World after His Resurrection (see 3 Nephi 11:7); and the First Vision (see JS–H 1:17).

In each of these instances, the sentiments expressed by God the Father are so similar to one another as to be considered virtually identical: “This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” While it is possible that Nephi’s encounter with the Father is an

example of the premortal Savior (Jehovah) speaking as though He were God the Father, a more compelling case is made for this being the actual voice of God the Father. It fits the pattern of the Father bearing witness of the Son as seen elsewhere. It uses almost the same language, certainly the same sentiment, of the other examples. And it concerns the baptism of the Son, which we know evoked the Father's voice when the Savior experienced the ordinance in the flesh.

If 2 Nephi recounts the actual utterance of God the Father, then it is unique in our scriptural library for it is our only record of the Father's actual voice being heard by a mortal being *before* His Son, our Redeemer, was born into mortality. In other words, 2 Nephi 31 is the only recorded instance in scripture of the Father bearing testimony of the premortal Savior. Were we to judge the value of the Book of Mormon based on this episode alone, we would be compelled to label the sacred text not only unique but truly invaluable.

Another invaluable contribution to our understanding of the doctrine of the fatherhood of God is made by Alma in his discourse to the people of Gideon. He describes the context or background of Christ's birth into mortality in these words: "And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God" (Alma 7:10).

Here we learn not only that the earthly name of the Savior's mortal mother was foreknown by prophets long before the actual events occurred, but also that Mary herself was specially chosen during her sojourn in our premortal state to perform her special role of motherhood. (It will be remembered that the Prophet Joseph Smith taught that every man, and by implication every woman, who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of this world was foreordained to that calling in the Grand Council before the world was created.² What greater calling could any individual have than to be the mother of the literal Son of God in mortality?) In addition, we understand from Alma's comment that the third member of the Godhead had a role in the

mortal birth of the Son of God. On this point, Elder Melvin J. Ballard has offered the following commentary:

“Joseph Smith made it perfectly clear that Jesus Christ told the absolute truth, as did those who testify concerning him, the Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, wherein he is declared to be the very Son of God. And if God the Eternal Father is not the real Father of Jesus Christ, then we are in confusion; then he is not in reality the Son of God. But we declare that he *is* the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh. Mary told the story most beautifully when she said that an angel of the Lord came to her and told her that she had found favor in the sight of God and had come to be worthy of the fulfillment of the promises heretofore made, to become the virgin mother of the Redeemer of the world. She afterwards, referring to the event, said: ‘God hath done wonderful things unto me.’ ‘And the Holy Ghost came upon her,’ in the story, ‘and she came into the presence of the highest.’ No man or woman can live in mortality and survive the presence of the Highest except by the sustaining power of the Holy Ghost. So it came upon her to prepare her for admittance into the divine presence, and the power of the Highest, who is the Father, was present, and overshadowed her, and the holy Child that was born of her was called the Son of God.”³

Perhaps the most compelling text in the Book of Mormon that discusses God the Father is found in the section that details the post-Resurrection appearance of the Savior in the New World, namely 3 Nephi 11:3–28:15. These chapters contain the Savior’s personal teachings and testimony given to His American Israelites and give to us in modern times important insights regarding His relationship with His divine Father as well as the Father’s will concerning us. Of the eighteen chapters comprising this section, only two do not mention the Father: 3 Nephi 22 (which is the Savior’s recitation of Isaiah 54) and 3 Nephi 25 (wherein the Savior quotes Malachi 4). A list of a few of the references to the Father in each of the other sixteen chapters may be profitable.

3 Nephi 11. The voice of the Father introduces and bears witness of the Savior (see 3 Nephi 11:7).

The Savior tells His disciples that He and the Father are one (see 3 Nephi 11:27).

The Savior testifies that His doctrine was given to Him by the Father; He also bears record of the Father, and the Father and the Holy Ghost, in turn, bear witness of Him (see 3 Nephi 11:31–32, 35–36).

3 Nephi 12. The Savior exhorts all to let their light shine and, thus, glorify their Father in Heaven (see 3 Nephi 12:16).

The Savior exhorts all disciples to be perfect just as He or their Father in Heaven is perfect (see 3 Nephi 12:48).

3 Nephi 13. The Savior teaches the order of prayer—instructing His disciples to address their Father who already knows all things they need before they ask (see 3 Nephi 13:8–9).

3 Nephi 14. The Savior describes the Father's concern for His children as being much greater than mortal parents' concern for their children; the Father will give good things to those who ask (see 3 Nephi 14:11).

The Savior declares that only those who actually do the will of their Father in Heaven will be able to enter the kingdom of heaven (see 3 Nephi 14:21).

3 Nephi 15. The Savior testifies that it is the Father who has given the house of Joseph its land of inheritance (see 3 Nephi 15:12–13).

The Savior explains that at no time did the Father give Him a commandment to teach the Jerusalem disciples about the other tribes of the house of Israel, whom the Father led away out of their lands (see 3 Nephi 15:15).

The Savior declares that He received commandments of the Father to teach some things and not others because of the unbelief manifested by the Israelites in the Old World (see 3 Nephi 15:15–18).

The Savior tells His disciples in the New World that they, as well as other tribes, were separated from the Old World Israelites by the Father (see 3 Nephi 15:19–20).

3 Nephi 16. The Savior reiterates that He was commanded by the Father to give the American Israelites the land on which they were residing as their land of inheritance (see 3 Nephi 16:16).

3 Nephi 17. The Savior commands the people to go to their homes

and ask the Father in His (Jesus') name for understanding concerning the teachings that the Father commanded the Savior to give to them (see 3 Nephi 17:3).

The Savior tells the multitude that He is going to the Father and then to the lost tribes of Israel (see 3 Nephi 17:4).

The Savior speaks directly to the Father, calling Him "Father" (see 3 Nephi 17:14).

After calling out to the Father, the Savior then kneels and prays to the Father, speaking words so great and marvelous they cannot be repeated (see 3 Nephi 17:15–18).

The Savior prays to the Father on behalf of the little children (see 3 Nephi 17:21).

3 Nephi 18. The Savior teaches His disciples to partake of the sacrament as a testimony to the Father that they do always remember the Savior and His sacrifice, and as a witness to the Father that they are willing to do the things the Savior has commanded (see 3 Nephi 18:1–11).

The Savior tells the Nephites that He must go unto His Father to fulfill other commandments that the Father has given Him (see 3 Nephi 18:27).

3 Nephi 19. The twelve special disciples divide the multitude into twelve groups and teach them to pray unto the Father in the name of Jesus (see 3 Nephi 19:5–9).

The Savior prays to the Father in a manner that resembles the great High Priestly prayer He offered in Jerusalem (see 3 Nephi 19:20–23, 27–29; compare John 17).

The Savior again prays to the Father in words that cannot be recorded (see 3 Nephi 19:31–32).

3 Nephi 20. The Savior speaks of the covenant which He says the Father made with the house of Israel through Abraham and the patriarchs (see 3 Nephi 20:12–13, 25). That He is speaking of Himself acting in the role of the Father seems unlikely when one considers the subsequent verse where He also declares that the Father raised Him up and sent Him to the Nephites to bless them because they are the children of the covenant (see 3 Nephi 20:26).

The Savior teaches the people that the Father is behind the gathering of Israel and will fulfill the covenant which He made with Abraham (see 3 Nephi 20:27–34).

The Savior declares that with the fulfillment of the covenant, all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of the Father. He also reiterates that He and the Father are one (see 3 Nephi 20:35).

3 Nephi 21. The Savior teaches the Nephites that the Gentiles will be established in their land and be set up as a free people by the power of the Father. Furthermore, the Gentiles will be instrumental in fulfilling the covenant of the Father with a remnant of the Nephite and Lamanite peoples (see 3 Nephi 21:2–5).

The Savior speaks of the work of the Father (see 3 Nephi 21:26).

3 Nephi 23. The Savior commands that certain things be added to the Nephites' records, which will go forth to the Gentiles according to the time and will of the Father (see 3 Nephi 23:4).

3 Nephi 24. The Savior commands the disciples to write down the words which the Father had given to Malachi (see 3 Nephi 24:1).

3 Nephi 26. The Savior tells the multitude that the Father commanded Him to restore to them those scriptures which they did not have in their possession because the Father wants the scriptures to go forth to future generations (see 3 Nephi 26:2).

The narrative explains that the Savior did go back to the Father after the end of the second day that He was with the people (see 3 Nephi 26:15).

3 Nephi 27. The Savior shows Himself to the disciples as they are praying unto the Father in His (Jesus') name (see 3 Nephi 27:2).

The Savior defines the gospel in its simplest form as His act of doing the will of the Father. He says His Father sent Him into the world to be lifted up on the cross. And just as men would lift Him up, so would men be lifted up by the Father because of the Son's atoning act (see 3 Nephi 27:13–14).

The Savior declares that He will act as a mediator, holding men guiltless before His Father if they will endure in righteousness. He was given this power as mediator by His Father (see 3 Nephi 27:15–16).

3 Nephi 28. The Savior tells the Three Nephites that because of

their selfless request to tarry on the earth and not taste death, just as the Apostle John had requested, they shall have a fulness of joy, sit down in the kingdom of His Father, and be even as He is, that is, like the Father. "I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one" (3 Nephi 28:10).

CLARIFYING SOME POSSIBLE CONFUSION

Reflection on the Savior's references to the Father in 3 Nephi raises an interesting issue. From the Savior's statements it would seem that the Father is much more involved than we may have previously thought in matters of salvation history that are usually ascribed to Jehovah. For example, the Savior said it was the Father who made the covenant with the house of Israel through Abraham (see 3 Nephi 20:12–13, 25).

It is the Father who is intimately involved in the scattering and gathering of the house of Israel. And it was the Father who gave the prophet Malachi the words recorded in Malachi 3:1. Yet we know that the scriptures teach that it was Jehovah who covenanted with Abraham (see Abraham 1:16; 2:6–8), that it was Jehovah who inspired the prophets of old like Malachi, and that only on rare occasions has God the Father been directly involved with mortals on this earth. Given those truths, it might almost sound like the Father being spoken of by the Savior in 3 Nephi is Jehovah, and that Jehovah is a being separate from Jesus Christ, or on the other hand if Jehovah and Jesus are one and the same, that Christ in 3 Nephi is speaking to or about Himself and praying to Himself as Jehovah, that He suffered His own will on the cross, and that it was He who caused Himself to be raised from the dead.

Resolution of the seeming confusion may be found by integrating the Savior's statements in 3 Nephi with other revelations of the Restoration. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith we know that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are separate and distinct personages (see D&C 130:22; JS–H 1:17). From the Book of Mormon itself we know that Jesus Christ was the premortal Jehovah come to earth as the long-awaited Messiah (see 3 Nephi 15:5). We also know that the plan of salvation was Heavenly Father's plan and that Jesus Christ put into effect

or executed all the terms and conditions of His Father's plan (see Moses 4:1–4), whether acting in premortality as Jehovah or acting in mortality as Christ. We further know from the Savior's emphasis of the point He makes in 3 Nephi, as well as from modern revelation, that even though the Godhead is composed of individual beings, their unity in perfection is far more intertwined and intense than we mortals might comprehend.

The Savior Himself told the Nephites several times that He and the Father are one—not in personage or physical form, but in purpose. But even more than that, says the Savior, "I am *in* the Father, and the Father *in* me, and the Father and I are one" (3 Nephi 11:27; emphasis added; see also 3 Nephi 9:15; 19:23; and 28:10). In other words, the Father and the Son, whether the Son is acting as Jehovah or Christ, are so unified in mind and will that what one thinks, says, and does, the other one thinks, says, and does exactly.

This concept has been described in part by modern prophets as the principle of divine investiture of authority. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught:

"Christ is also our Father because his Father has given him of his fulness; that is, he has received a fulness of the glory of the Father. This is taught in Doctrine and Covenants 93:1–5, 16–17, and also by Abinadi in the 15th chapter of Mosiah. Abinadi's statement that he is 'the Father, because he was conceived by the power of God,' harmonizes with the Lord's own words in section 93 that he is the Father because he has received of the fulness of the Father. Christ says he is the Son because, 'I was in the world and made flesh my tabernacle, and dwelt among the sons of men.' Abinadi expresses this truth by saying he is 'the Son because of the flesh.'

"The Father has honored Christ by placing his name upon him, so that he can minister in and through that name as though he were the Father; and thus, so far as power and authority are concerned, his words and acts become and are those of the Father."⁴

Thus, when the Savior visited His American Israelites He testified with perfect propriety of His Father's intimate involvement in those matters of salvation history (covenanting with Abraham, speaking

through Old Testament and Book of Mormon prophets, and establishing laws and commandments on the earth) with which Jehovah was also intimately involved. And yet there are also some actions and sayings attributed to the Father in the text of 3 Nephi that are uniquely God the Father's. When His voice bears witness of His Beloved Son, in whom He is "well pleased," it is the Father's voice and no other (3 Nephi 11:7). When the Savior testifies that it was by the power of the Father that He was raised up, it is the power of God the Father and no other (see 3 Nephi 27:14–15). When the Savior declares that He will hold the righteous guiltless before the Father (acting as a mediator representing us to the Father), it is the Father before whom the Savior will stand and no other (see 3 Nephi 27:16; see also D&C 45:3–5). And when the Savior declares that He received the doctrine that He teaches from the Father, it is ultimately God the Father from whom all doctrine originates, for it was originally the Father's plan by which we live (see 3 Nephi 11:31–32; Moses 4:1–4).

CONCLUSION

The words of the Book of Mormon and modern prophets describe a doctrine of the Godhead and a doctrine of God the Eternal Father that is so much more profound, and at the same time so much simpler, than Trinitarian formulations. Joseph Smith said that he had "*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."⁵ Both the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's personal experience and teaching are monumental witnesses of God the Father.

The Book of Mormon is not an elementary treatise on, nor does it contain a confused notion of, the doctrine of the Godhead. It does not display an evolving concept of the Godhead, where only later Book of Mormon prophets knew of three separate Deities. Nor does it support the idea of a prophet-translator who only later in his ministry came to understand a clear picture of three distinct personages. From its beginning, the Book of Mormon teaches what Joseph Smith knew from the

beginning. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost are separate and distinct personages, though they think, speak, and act as one God. And they testify of each other, as the Book of Mormon so powerfully demonstrates. “And in the mouth of three witnesses shall these things be established; and the testimony of three, and this work, in the which shall be shown forth the power of God and also his word, of which the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost bear record—and all this shall stand as a testimony against the world at the last day” (Ether 5:4).

NOTES

1. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught: “All revelation since the fall has come through Jesus Christ, who is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. In all of the scriptures, where God is mentioned and where he has appeared, it was Jehovah who talked with Abraham, with Noah, Enoch, Moses and all the prophets. . . . The Father has never dealt with man directly and personally since the fall, and he has never appeared except to introduce and bear record of the Son. Thus the *Inspired Version* records that ‘no man hath seen God at any time, except he hath borne record of the Son’” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970], 1:27).

2. See Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 365.

3. Bryant S. Hinckley, ed., *Sermons and Missionary Services of Melvin Joseph Ballard* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1949), 166–67.

4. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:29–30.

5. Smith, *Teachings*, 370; emphasis added.