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“If Ye Believe on His Name”: Wordplay on the Name Samuel in Helaman 14:2, 12–13 and 3 Nephi 23:9 and the Doctrine of Christ in Samuel’s Speech

Author(s): Matthew L. Bowen

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Matthew L. Bowen

Abstract: *The Semitic/Hebrew name Samuel (šēmû`ēl) most likely means “his name is El” — i.e., “his name [the name that he calls upon in worship] is El” — although it was also associated with “hearing” (šāma`) God (e.g., 1 Samuel 3:9–11). In the ancient Near East, the parental hope for one thus named is that the son (and “his name”) would glorify El (a name later understood in ancient Israel to refer to God); or, like the biblical prophet Samuel, the child would hear El/God (“El is heard”). The name šēmû`ēl thus constituted an appropriate symbol of the mission of the Son of God who “glorified the name of the Father” (Ether 12:8), was perfectly obedient to the Father in all things, and was the Prophet like Moses par excellence, whom Israel was to “hear” or “hearken” in all things (Deuteronomy 18:15; 1 Nephi 22:20; 3 Nephi 20:32). Jesus may have referred to this in a wordplay on the name Samuel when he said: “I commanded my servant Samuel, the Lamanite, that he should testify unto this people, that at the day that the Father should glorify his name in me that there were many saints who should arise from the dead” (3 Nephi 23:9). Samuel the Lamanite had particularly emphasized “believ[ing] on the name” of God’s Son in the second part of his speech (see Helaman 14:2, 12–13) in advance of the latter’s coming. Samuel thus seems to use a recurrent or thematic rhetorical wordplay on his own name as an entry point to calling the Nephites to repent and return to living the doctrine of Christ, which activates the blessings of the atonement of Jesus Christ. Mormon took great care to show that all of the signs and prophecies that Samuel gave the Nephites of Zarahemla were fulfilled at the time of Jesus’s birth, death, and resurrection as Jesus glorified the Father’s name in*

every particular, and found further fulfillment in some particulars during Mormon's own life and times.

Mormon had an exceptional regard for Samuel the Lamanite as a prophet. He demonstrates as much by his lengthy inclusion of parts of Samuel's prophecy to the reprobate Nephites of Zarahemla (Helaman 13–15) and also by the care he took to show how the signs and prophecies that Samuel gave his hearers came to complete fulfillment.¹

Nevertheless, no greater commendation of Samuel — the man and his message — exists than the one given by Jesus Christ himself. Mormon records that Jesus mildly chided the Nephite record-keepers, including Nephi₃ himself, for failing to include Samuel's prophecy regarding the resurrection of the dead and numerous post-resurrection appearances of the righteous dead (see 3 Nephi 23:6–13). This censure included the following statement:

Verily I say unto you: I commanded my servant *Samuel* [šēmû'ēl] the Lamanite that he should testify unto this people that at the day that *the Father* should glorify *his name* [Hebrew šēmô] in me that there were many saints who should arise from the dead and should appear unto many and should minister unto them. And he said unto them: Were it not so? (3 Nephi 23:9; emphasis in all scriptural citations is mine.)²

In this declaration, Jesus plays on the Semitic/Hebrew name šēmû'ēl — “his name is El” — in terms of its onomastic components: šēmô (“his name”) + 'ēl, (“El” or God). In other words, Jesus invokes šēmû'ēl, “a name which glorifies God,”³ in close conjunction with his own stated mission as Son of God: the Father “glorify[ing] his name in [him].” This, of course, was Jesus's humble way of confirming that he had “glorified the name of the Father.”⁴

In this article, I endeavor to show that Samuel's speech, as preserved by Mormon, includes language that plays on his own name in terms of its Semitic/Hebrew meaning, “his name is El.” Moreover, I attempt to show that Samuel the Lamanite's repeated use of the collocation “believe on *his name* [šēmô]” in Helaman 14:2, 12–13 constitutes a deliberate

1. See, e.g., 3 Nephi 1:5–25; 8:3–25; Mormon 1:19; 2:10.

2. Book of Mormon citations will generally follow Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

3. Peter R. Ackroyd, *The Book of First Samuel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 26.

4. Ether 12:8.

rhetorical wordplay on his own name. He uses this wordplay as an entry point to calling the Nephites to return to the doctrine of Christ.

Samuel: "His Name Is El" or "The Name is God"

The Hebrew Bible attests Samuel as the name of one of ancient Israel's most important prophets. The biblical text etiologizes the name Samuel in terms of the verb *šā'al*, "ask," "request," "demand," "loan (on request)" (1 Samuel 1:20, 27–28; 2:20; cf. 1:17) but also creates numerous instances of interpretive paronomasia on the name Samuel in terms of the verbs *šāma'*, "hear," "hearken," "obey." For example, Samuel's birth narrative describes Hannah praying to God: "Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was *not heard* [*lō' yiššāmēa'*]: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken" (1 Samuel 1:13). The point here, of course, is that God *did* hear Hannah's prayer, though Eli could not. In the subsequent birth of a son named Samuel (*šēmû'ēl*), the ancient Israelite audience can hear the aural echo of **šāmûa' + 'ēl*, "heard of God." The narrative of Samuel's prophetic call in 1 Samuel 3 has a slightly different emphasis. The narrative records how Samuel uniquely "heard" the voice of God: "Therefore Eli said unto Samuel [*šēmû'ēl*]. Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth [*šōmēa'*]. So Samuel [*šēmû'ēl*] went and lay down in his place. And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel [*šēmû'ēl, šēmû'ēl*]. Then Samuel [*šēmû'ēl*] answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth [*šōmēa'*]. And the Lord said to Samuel [*šēmû'ēl*], Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it [*kol-šōm'ō*] shall tingle" (1 Samuel 3:9–11). The wordplay on "Samuel" in terms of "hearing" the voice of God and God's doing a "thing [word]" that will be "heard" suggests the meaning "El is heard" or "God is heard," similar to the well-attested Hebrew name Shammua (*šammûa'*),⁵ "the one who is heard."⁶ Additional passages throughout the Samuel-Saul cycle link play on the name Samuel in terms of *šāma'*, to "hear."⁷

A point on which virtually every modern exegete agrees is that Hannah's explanation for naming her son Samuel in 1 Samuel 1:20 is not etymological: "Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come

5. Numbers 13:4; 2 Samuel 5:14/1 Chronicles 14:4; Nehemiah 11:17; 12:18.

6. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2001), 1555. Hereafter cited as *HALOT*.

7. See further 1 Samuel 8:7, 9, 18–19, 21–22; 12:1; 15:1, 14, 20, 22, 24; 16:2; 28:18, 21–23.

about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name [šēmô] Samuel [šēmû'ēl], saying, Because *I have asked him of the Lord* [mēyhwh šē'iltîw].” The notion that šēmû'ēl derives from šā'ûl-mē-ēl underlies this explanation.⁸ However, as many commentators have noted, this paronomastic explanation of the name Samuel in terms of the verb šā'al (“ask”) clearly fits the name of “Saul” (šā'ûl, “asked”) rather than “Samuel” in etymological terms. Since the biblical narrative already has the imminent advent of Saul in 1 Samuel 8–12 in view,⁹ the narrator’s primary concern in including this etymology is not to offer a precise etymology for šēmû'ēl but to establish an inextricable onomastic link between the names and persons Samuel and Saul, whose destinies are intertwined. For these reasons, seeking a more precise “scientific” etymological explanation for Samuel becomes necessary.

As noted above, the call narrative of the biblical prophet Samuel — for whom Samuel the Lamanite was likely named — thoroughly ties the name Samuel to the verb šāma' (see 1 Samuel 3:9–12) through a play on similar sounds (paronomasia). The homophony between the name Samuel (šēmû'ēl) and the verb šāma' creates another midrashic or interpretative meaning for the name Samuel, suggesting the idea “God is heard,” “hearer of God,” or as Garsiel puts it, “one who hears the word of God.”¹⁰ We note the prominent juxtaposition and repetition of the name Samuel with the verb “hear” throughout the Samuel cycle.¹¹

Nevertheless, the more likely etymology for the name Samuel (šēmû'ēl), at least in terms of its Hebrew spelling, appears to be “his name is El” (šmw, “name” + the possessive suffix w [“his”]); or, “his name [the name on which he cultically calls] is El” from an earlier Semitic *šimuhū + 'il.¹² As Koehler and Baumgartner aver, Samuel constitutes “a personal name which has many precedents: in Amorite [Western Semitic] and Ugaritic, which corresponds to Hebrew [šēmû] is *sumul*

8. P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 62.

9. Matthew L. Bowen “According to All That You Demanded” (*Deuteronomy 18:16*): *The Literary Use of Names and Leitworte as Antimonarchic Polemic in the Deuteronomistic History* (Doctoral Dissertation, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, 2014), 59–89.

10. Moshe Garsiel, “Word Play and Puns as a Rhetorical Device in the Book of Samuel,” in *Puns and Pundits: Wordplay in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature.*, ed. Scott B. Noegel (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2000), 186.

11. See note 7.

12. See, e.g., McCarter, *I Samuel*, 62.

*samu/šumu*¹³ — i.e., “name.” Peter Ackroyd has noted that *šēmû’ēl* “means, ‘the (his) name is El’, i.e. his nature, his person is El.”¹⁴ To which he adds, “It is a name which glorifies God.”¹⁵ The presence of the theophoric element “El,” understood later to refer to “God,” is beyond dispute. since it constitutes one of the commonest onomastic elements in biblical Hebrew. West Semitic names like *Sumu-AN*,¹⁶ i.e., *Sumu-el*, “the name of one of the kings of Larsa”¹⁷ support this etymology.

Others have suggested that this element is a form of *šmh/šmy* “to be high,”¹⁸ thus, “El is exalted.” Although the name *šēmû’ēl* much more plausibly represents *šēmô + ’ēl* than *šmh/šmy*, a paronomastic association along the lines of the wordplay involving *šēm* (“name”) and *šāmayim* (“heaven”) in the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:4 would have been natural, if not inevitable: “And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto *heaven* [*šāmayim*]; and let us make us *a name* [*šēm*, i.e., a reputation or even a monument or a memorial] lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (see further below).

“At the Day That the Father Should Glorify His Name in Me”

As noted at the outset, the supreme commendation of Samuel the Lamanite as prophet comes from Jesus Christ himself. After quoting Isaiah 54 to the Lamanites and Nephites assembled at the temple in Bountiful on the second day of his ministry there, the Lord declared: “And whosoever *will hearken* [*yišma’*] unto my words and repenteth and is baptized, the same shall be saved. Search the prophets, for many there be that testify of these things” (3 Nephi 23:5). The Savior, quoting or paraphrasing the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:15–19, had just previously declared: “Behold, I am he of whom Moses spake, saying: A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; *him shall ye hear* [*’ēlāw tišmā’ ūn*] in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul who *will*

13. HALOT, 1554–55.

14. Ackroyd, *First Book of Samuel*, 26.

15. Ibid.

16. Theodor Bauer, *Die Ostkanaanäer: Eine philologisch-historische Untersuchung über die Wanderschicht der sogenannten “Amoriter” in Babylonien* (Leipzig, DEU Verlag der Asia Major, 1926), 39. For a broader list of SUMU — names, see pp. 38–40.

17. HALOT, 1555.

18. Arabic *sm’* “be high, exalted”; see HALOT, 1554–55. Cf. Book of Abraham Facsimile 1:12.

not hear [lō'-yišma'] that prophet shall be cut off from among the people. Verily I say unto you, yea, and all the prophets from *Samuel* [šēmû'ēl, the biblical prophet] and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have testified of me" (3 Nephi 20:23–24).

It is in the context of the foregoing that Jesus then commanded the Nephite prophetic records be brought forward for examination, for they too were among the raised-up prophets “like unto” Moses, who typified and testified of Jesus Christ. Samuel the Lamanite, like his namesake, was one of those prophets. In examining the records, Jesus soon recognized that one of Samuel’s most important prophecies was missing from the collection. Gently reproving Nephi and the Nephite record-keepers for their failure to record this prophecy, he mentions the name Samuel in close connection with his own mission to glorify the Father’s “name,” of which Samuel had prophesied:

Verily I say unto you: I commanded my servant *Samuel* [šēmû'ēl] the Lamanite that he should testify unto this people that *at the day that the Father should glorify his name* [šēmô] *in me* that there were many saints who should arise from the dead and should appear unto many, and should minister unto them. And he said unto them: Were it not so? (3 Nephi 23:9)

This juxtaposition of the name Samuel with the phrase “glorify his name” creates a lucid wordplay strikingly consistent with the etymology and function of that name, “his name is El [God]” or “the Name is God” — i.e., “a name which glorifies God.”¹⁹ In other words, Samuel’s name constitutes a sign of what the Father did, “glorified his name in [Jesus],” and what Jesus did, “glorified the name of the Father” (Ether 12:8; see also 3 Nephi 11:11 below).

Since the theophoric -'ēl element in šēmû'ēl sometimes denoted “God” in the most general sense, one can variously understand its precise referent depending on the literary or historical context. For example, the literary etymology of 1 Samuel 1:20 (“I asked him from the Lord”) interprets 'ēl as referring to Yahweh. In earlier times, however, 'ēl had reference to El, the father of the Canaanite pantheon (see, e.g., 4QDeutj and 4QDeutq Deuteronomy 32:8; cf. Ugaritic 'il [“El”] and the *bn 'il*, which can be rendered “sons of El” or “the family of El”).²⁰

19. Ackroyd, *First Book of Samuel*, 26.

20. Cf. Gregorio Del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, 3rd rev. ed. (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2015), 224. Cf. also *dr bn 'il* (these can be rendered “the family circle of El” or “the

Moreover, Jesus’s use of *šēmû’ēl/šēmô* polyptoton recalls Samuel’s emphasis in his speech to the Nephites of Zarahemla “believ[ing] in *his name* [*šēmô*]” (Helaman 14:2, 12–13, see below). And it is even possible that when Jesus states, “I commanded my servant *Samuel* [*šēmû’ēl*], the Lamanite that he should testify unto this people that *at the day that the Father should glorify his name* [*šēmô*] in me . . .” (3 Nephi 23:9), he includes a part of the prophecy that Mormon elided from his presentation of Samuel’s speech. A prophecy of “the day” when “the Father” would “glorify his name” in the Son fits Samuel’s thematic emphasis on the divine “name” in the second part of that speech, where Mormon places the resurrection prophecy.

Jesus’s *šēmû’ēl/šēmô* polyptoton, then, also recalls two seminal moments earlier in Mormon’s abridged 3 Nephi account of the complete fulfillment of Samuel the Lamanite’s prophecies. Indeed, he evokes at least two divine pronouncements from the aftermath of the fulfillment of Samuel the Lamanite’s prophecies concerning the death of Jesus Christ and the destruction that ensued. First, he harks back to his declaration: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ the *Son of God* [*’ēl’ēlôhîm*]. I created the *heavens* [*šāmayim*] and the earth and all things that in them are. I was with the Father from the beginning. I am in the Father and the Father in me; and *in me hath the Father glorified his name* [*šēmô*]” (3 Nephi 9:15).

Second, Jesus’s words recall and restate God the Father’s testimony of him, as Mormon records and preserves it in 3 Nephi 11. The voice of the Father from heaven introduces Jesus thus: “Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, *in whom I have glorified my name* [*šēmô*]. Hear ye [*šim’û*] him!” (3 Nephi 11:7). The Father’s command recalls Moses’s charge regarding the raised-up Prophet in “unto him ye shall hearken [*tišmā’ûn*]” (Deuteronomy 18:15) or “him shall ye hear” (1 Nephi 22:20). God the Father’s testimony of his Son also appears to somewhat reflect the structure of Isaiah 49:3 (1 Nephi 21:3): “*Thou art my servant*, O Israel, in whom *I will be glorified* [*’etpā’ār*].” However, the idiom “glorified my name” may rather reflect the liturgical language of Psalm 86: “I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: *and I will glorify thy name* [*wa’ākabbēdâ šimkā*] for evermore” (Psalm 86:12; see also v. 9). Jesus — the worshipper of God par excellence — subsequently describes how he glorified the Father and his name: “I have drank out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me and *have glorified the Father* in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the

circle of the sons of El”), and *mphrt bn ’il* (“the family assembly of El” or “assembly of the sons of El”). I have slightly adjusted their translations.

will of the Father in all things from the beginning” (3 Nephi 11:11; cf. Psalm 40:7–8).

“O Ye People of the Land, That Ye Would Hear My Words”

Samuel the Lamanite was a prophet’s prophet. He demonstrates a thorough knowledge of earlier Nephite prophecy. Likely named after the ancient biblical prophet, Samuel’s use of prophetic speech forms also suggests a broader knowledge of ancient Israelite prophecy. Donald W. Parry identifies six “revelatory speech forms or formulaic expressions [that] are unique to prophetic writings,” all of which Samuel employs within his speech.²¹

Thus, in perhaps the most Israelite fashion imaginable, Samuel calls on the Nephites of Zarahemla to “hearken” or “hear” the words of the Lord as he delivered those words to them: “Behold, ye the people of this great city, and *hearken unto my words. Yea, hearken unto the words which the Lord saith.* For behold, he saith that ye are cursed because of your riches, and also are your riches cursed because ye have set your hearts upon them, *and have not hearkened* unto the words of him who gave them unto you” (Helaman 13:21). Parry cites Samuel’s command “hearken unto my words” as a classic example of the use of the prophetic “proclamation formula”²² and “an emphatic summons to hear the word of the Lord.”²³ He chides the Nephites precisely because they have not hearkened unto him or the prophets before him (e.g., Helaman’s sons, Nephi and Lehi) who had been calling them to repentance.

The first part of Samuel’s speech (comprising Helaman 13) closes with yet another plea to Samuel’s Nephite audience that they will “hear” him: “O ye people of the land, *that ye would hear* [cf. Hebrew *tišmā’ ū*] *my words!* And I pray that the anger of the Lord be turned away from you and that ye would repent and be saved” (Helaman 13:39). Samuel’s prophetic plea that the people would “hear” has a double echo: his own name and the figure of the raised up prophet as described in Deuteronomy 18:15–17. His additional wish that they would “repent and be saved” begins a focus on the doctrine of Christ²⁴ that is strongly interwoven wordplay

21. Donald W. Parry, “Thus Saith the Lord: Prophetic Language in Samuel,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 181.

22. *Ibid.*, 181–82.

23. *Ibid.*, 182.

24. Noel B. Reynolds, “Biblical Merismus in Book of Mormon Gospel References” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 26 (2017): 128.

on the name Samuel in terms of the phrase “believe on his name” in the next part of his speech.

**“Then Cometh the Son of God
to Redeem All Those Who Shall Believe on His Name”**

After Samuel’s prophetic plea that the Nephites “would hear [his] words,” Mormon abridges Samuel’s speech. He then resumes it thus:

And now it came to pass that *Samuel* [šēmû’ēl] the Lamanite did prophesy a great many more things which cannot be written. And behold, he saith unto them: Behold, I give unto you a sign. For five years more cometh, and behold, then cometh the *Son of God* [Hebrew ’ēl’ēlōhîm] to redeem all those who shall *believe on his name* [Hebrew šēmô]. (Helaman 14:1–2)

The point at which Mormon chooses to resume Samuel’s direct speech is significant for at least two reasons. First, in resuming the speech with a juxtaposition of the name šēmû’ēl with the giving of a “sign” that would mark the “com[ing]” of “the son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name [šēmô],” Mormon draws out the lexical link between šēmû’ēl and its onomastic components, “his name” (šēmô) and “God” (’ēl’ēlōhîm). This wordplay leads us to see that šēmû’ēl itself constitutes a fitting “sign” of the Son of God’s mission to glorify the Father and the Father’s “name” in addition to the other remarkable “signs” pertaining to Christ that Samuel gives. Hebrew šēm (or “name”) in some contexts took on the meaning “posterity” (see, e.g., Deuteronomy 25:7; Ruth 4:5, 10; Isaiah 14:22), adding an important new sense in which Jesus “glorified the name of the Father” (see again Ether 12:8; cf. Moses 1:39).

Second, Mormon resumes his record of Samuel’s speech where the previous part left off (Helaman 13:39) — i.e., with a meristic reference to what Nephi described as “the doctrine of Christ” in 2 Nephi 31 or the “very points of doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved” (1 Nephi 15:14).²⁵ As Noel B. Reynolds has shown at length, Nephi and his successors often invoke the doctrine of

25. On Nephi’s systematic presentation of the gospel and the doctrine of Jesus Christ by Nephi and his successors, see Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets,” *BYU Studies* 31 (Summer 1991): 31–50; Reynolds, “The True Points of My Doctrine,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 2 (1996): 26–56; see also Reynolds, “How to Come unto Christ,” *Ensign* 22 (September 1992): 7–13; Reynolds, “The Gospel According to Mormon,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 68, no. 2 (May 2015): 218–34; Reynolds, “The Gospel

Christ in meristic form (or as a *merismus*).²⁶ At least three examples of this kind of merismus (Helaman 13:39; 14:8, 29)²⁷ — and arguably four (Helaman 14:2)²⁸ — occur in Samuel the Lamanite’s speech, and three of these in direct connection with wordplay on Samuel’s name (Helaman 13:39; 14:2, 8).

At least two prominent texts from the Hebrew Bible widely cited over the last few centuries in discussions of salvation can be read or understood as meristic summations of the doctrine of Christ. Paul at least twice quotes Habakkuk’s statement “the just *shall live* [*yihyeh*] by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4).²⁹ On one level, Hebrew *’ēmûnâ* — as faith — constitutes the first principle of the gospel. On another, *’ēmûnâ* — as covenant “faithfulness” or constancy — constitutes the fifth principle of the gospel, “endur[ing] to the end.” “Live” (*yihyeh*), in the sense of eternal life (cf. *ḥay lē’ōlām*, Genesis 3:22) represents the last principle.

Applying Nephi’s perspective to Joel’s prophecy in Joel 2:28–32 [MT 3:1–5] yields similar interpretative results. Joel concludes his prophecy of the latter-day (“afterward”) outpouring of the Lord’s spirit

According to Nephi: An Essay on 2 Nephi 31,” *Religious Educator* 16, no. 2 (2015): 51–75.

26. Reynolds, “Biblical Merismus in Book of Mormon Gospel References,” 106–34.

27. *Ibid.*, 128.

28. To Reynolds’s list, I would add Helaman 14:2 on the basis of the verb “redeem,” which is sometimes used synonymously with the verb “save.” See, e.g., Helaman 5:10: “And remember also the words which Amulek spake unto Zeezrom in the city of Ammonihah, for he said unto him that the Lord surely should come to *redeem* his people, but that he should not come to *redeem* them in their sins, but to *redeem* them from their sins.” Here Helaman cites the same event and conversation recorded in Alma 11:34–37: “And Zeezrom saith again: Shall he *save* his people in their sins? And Amulek answered and said unto him: I say unto you he shall not — for it is impossible for him to deny his word. Now Zeezrom saith unto the people: See that ye remember these things, for he saith there is but one God, yet he saith that the Son of God shall come but he shall not save his people, as though he had authority to command God. Now Amulek said again unto him: Behold thou hast lied; for thou sayest that I speak as though I had authority to command God because I said he shall not *save* his people in their sins. And I say unto you again that he cannot *save* them in their sins, for I cannot deny his word. And he hath said that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, how can ye be *saved* except ye inherit the kingdom of heaven? Therefore ye cannot be *saved* in your sins.”

29. See Romans 1:17 (“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith”); Galatians 3:11 (“But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith”). The author of Hebrews also quotes Habakkuk in Hebrews 10:38: “Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.”

and the signs in the heavens that would precede “the great and terrible day of the Lord,” with the promise that “whosoever shall call [*yiqrā*] on the name [*šēm*] of the Lord shall be delivered [*yimmālēt*]” (Joel 2:32; cf. Acts 2:10; Romans 10:13). “Call[ing] on the name of the Lord” represents having “faith” in the Lord, the first principle of the doctrine of Christ while “deliver[ance]” (*pēlēṭâ*) represents the last — i.e., salvation or eternal life.

Samuel the Lamanite’s subsequent prophecy of signs in the heavens that would herald the “coming” of the Son of God appears to follow the structure or at least the trajectory of Joel’s prophecy of signs in the heavens before the “coming” of the day of the Lord, including a meristic promise of deliverance or salvation through the doctrine of Christ:

And behold, this will I give unto you for a sign at the time of his coming. For behold, there shall be great lights in *heaven* [Hebrew *šamayim*], insomuch that in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day. Therefore there shall be one day and a night and a day, as if it were one day and there were no night. And this shall be unto you for a sign, for ye shall know of the rising of *the sun* [*šemeš*] and also of its setting. Therefore they shall know of a surety that there shall be two days and a night; nevertheless the night shall not be darkened. And it shall be the night before he is born. And behold, there shall be a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld; and this also shall be a sign unto you. And behold this is not all. There shall be many *signs and wonders in heaven* [*šamayim*]. And it shall come to pass that ye shall all be amazed and wonder, insomuch that ye shall fall to the earth. And it shall come to pass *that whosoever shall believe on the Son of God, the same shall have everlasting life.* (Helaman 14:3–8)

Samuel augments the previous wordplay on his own name (“those who shall believe on *his name* [*šēmô*]” with his use of the terms “heaven” [Hebrew *šamayim*] (twice) and “the sun” *šemeš*, paronomasia that functions similarly to the one in Genesis 11:4: “let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven [*šamayim*]; and let us make us a name [*šēm*, or reputation, monument, or memorial].” Samuel prophesies that everyone who sees these “signs and wonders in heaven”

would “fall to the earth.”³⁰ Those who would affirmatively respond in faith (“whosoever shall believe on the Son”) would activate the doctrine of Christ unto “everlasting life” in the same way that “the just [or justified one] shall live by his faith [or, faithfulness]” (Habakkuk 2:4) and that “whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered” (Joel 2:32 [MT 3:5]).

If Samuel’s use of the phrase “believe on his name” constitutes a play on his own name — whether in the context of the speech or on the literary level of Mormon’s editorial work — his repetitious use of the word “believe” may also constitute a play on or reference to his ethnic status as a “Lamanite.” As I have argued elsewhere, the names Laman and Lamanites came to have pejorative associations with “unbelief,” “unfaithfulness,” or “no faith” among the Nephites, clearly on the basis of Nephi’s words in 1 Nephi 12:22–23 and probably earlier texts like Deuteronomy 32:20, which described Israelites who were delinquent from the covenant as “children in whom is no faith [*lō’-’ēmun*]” — i.e., they have dwindled in “unbelief.”³¹ As we will see, Samuel’s repeated exhortative uses of the verb “believe” — Hebrew *’mn* — causes his immediate Nephite audience and Mormon’s latter-day audience to face a stark irony: the Lamanites, as exemplified by Samuel himself as a prophet of the Lord, came to embody unshakable faithfulness when they came to “believe” and walked the covenant path (Alma 23:5–6; 27:26–30). Samuel himself will belabor this point with an extended wordplay on “Lamanites” in terms of the Hebrew concept *’mn* (faith/believe/belief/steadfast/true/truth/firm/firmness/etc.) and “unbelief” (*lō’-’ēmun*) later in his speech (see Helaman 15:5–17).³² The Nephites, contrary to their

30. On ritual prostrations or “proskynesis” in the Book of Mormon, see Matthew L. Bowen, “They Came Forth and Fell Down and Partook of the Fruit of the Tree’: Proskynesis in 3 Nephi 11:12–19 and 17:9–10 and Its Significance” in *Third Nephi: New Perspectives on an Incomparable Scripture*, eds. Gaye Strathearn, Andrew Skinner (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2011), 107–29; Bowen, “And Behold, They Had Fallen to the Earth’: An Examination of Proskynesis in the Book of Mormon,” *Studia Antiqua* 4, no. 1 (2005): 91–110.

31. Matthew L. Bowen, “Not Partaking of the Fruit: Its Generational Consequences and Its Remedy,” in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision: The 40th Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*, eds. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: RSC, 2011), 240–63; Matthew L. Bowen, “The Faithfulness of Ammon,” *Religious Educator* 15, no. 2 (2014): 64–89.

32. See Helaman 15:7–15. Samuel plays on and reverses the Nephites’ traditional epithetic Laman/Lamanite/“unbelief” rhetoric in these verses, and then turns that

own self-perceptions, had dwindled in unbelief and become delinquent from the covenant.³³

Samuel’s threefold use of the expression “believe on his name” in Helaman 4:2, 12–13 taps into the Nephites’ long prophetic tradition of using this expression in reference to activating the doctrine of Christ (see, e.g., 2 Nephi 25:13–14; Alma 5:48; 11:40; 12:15; 26:35; 32:22; 34:15; cf. 2 Nephi 9:24).³⁴ But it also recalls Lamoni’s report of the vision that culminated in the conversion of his whole household and eventually much of his kingdom and the broader Lamanite population — people of whom Samuel appears to have been a descendant: “For as sure as thou livest, behold, I have seen my Redeemer, and he shall come forth and be born of a woman, and he shall redeem all mankind who believe on *his name* [Hebrew *šēmô*]” (Alma 19:13; cf. Alma 19:26; 22:13). All of the foregoing uses of “believe on his name” have some reference to activating and living the doctrine of Christ, which Samuel insists the Nephites need to do. It was none other than Nephi the son of Lehi, the great Nephite patriarch, who had declared as part of the “doctrine of Christ” that “there is none other way nor *name* [Hebrew *šēm*] given under *heaven* [*šāmayim*] whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 31:21; cf. 2 Nephi 31:11–13).

Of all the Book of Mormon writers, editors, or speakers who use forms of the phrase “believe on his name,” Samuel gives us its most concentrated use in his speech to the recalcitrant Nephites of Zarahemla, suggesting his emphatic and conscious use of this phrase as a rhetorical strategy. Samuel, whose own name bore witness to the sanctity and power of the divine name, was perhaps the perfect messenger to draw on this earlier Nephite prophetic language to call them back to the doctrine of Christ.

“To the Intent That Ye Might Believe on His Name”

The next part of Samuel’s speech brings the doctrine of Christ even nearer into the foreground. Samuel asserts a divine commission to

rhetoric fully on its head in the last recorded words in his speech in Helaman 15:17. A fuller study on this subject is forthcoming.

33. For an excellent discussion of this repeated cycle, see Book of Mormon Central, “How Does Chiasmus Teach Us to Reverse the Pride Cycle? (Alma 62:48–49),” *KnoWhy* #468, Sept 18, 2018, <https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowwhy/how-does-chiasmus-teach-us-to-reverse-the-pride-cycle>.

34. In 2 Nephi 9:24, this phrase is rendered “believe in his name.” Jacob states, “And if they will not repent and *believe in his name* and be baptized *in his name* and endure to the end, they must be damned, for the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has spoken it.”

preach repentance to the Nephites of Zarahemla as part of a broader commandment that they “prepare the way of the Lord”: “And behold, thus hath the Lord commanded me by his angel that I should come and tell this thing unto you. Yea, he hath commanded that I should prophesy these things unto you; yea, he hath said unto me: Cry unto this people: *repent and prepare the way of the Lord*” (Helaman 14:9).

Reynolds additionally notes that Nephi uses the expression “the way” (Hebrew *derek*) to describe the doctrine of Christ.³⁵ Indeed, Alma the Younger,³⁶ Samuel the Lamanite,³⁷ and Moroni³⁸ use the collocation “prepare the way” (Hebrew *pinnâ derek*, literally “clear the way”) as a metonymic description for living the doctrine of Christ or walking the covenant path.

Samuel the Lamanite’s rejection by the Nephites had a strong socio-ethnic or racial component to it as he declares in Helaman 14:10 (“And now because I am a Lamanite and hath spoken the words which the Lord hath commanded me ... ye are angry with me and do seek to destroy me”). The Nephites saw themselves, not least in their times of general moral degeneracy and covenant delinquency, as “the good” or “fair ones.”³⁹ They ever saw themselves thus vis-à-vis the Lamanites, whom they saw as the “unfaithful” or those who had dwindled in “unbelief.”⁴⁰ Samuel the Lamanite devotes much of the final stage of his speech (Helaman 15) to this very issue, as noted above.

35. Noel B. Reynolds, “This is the Way,” *Religious Educator* 14, no. 3 (2013): 79–91; Reynolds, “The Ancient Doctrine of the Two Ways and the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 56, no. 3 (2017): 49–78.

36. Alma 7:9: “But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: Cry unto this people, saying: Repent ye, repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord and walk in his paths, which are straight; for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth.”

37. Helaman 14:9.

38. Ether 9:28: “And there came prophets in the land again, crying *repentance* unto them, that they must *prepare the way of the Lord* or there should come a curse upon the face of the land; yea, even there should be a great famine, in which they should be destroyed if they did not repent.”

39. Matthew L. Bowen, “‘O Ye Fair Ones’: An Additional Note on the Meaning of the Name Nephi,” *Insights* 23, no. 6 (2003): 2–3; Bowen, “‘O Ye Fair Ones’ – Revisited,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 20 (2016): 315–44.

40. Bowen, “Not Partaking of the Fruit,” 240–63; Bowen, “The Faithfulness of Ammon,” 64–89; cf. Jo Ann Hackett’s suggestion that Ammonihah meant “Yahwe is (my) faithfulness,” with a *qatol*-form of the Hebrew root See Jo Ann Hackett and John W. Welch, “Possible Linguistic Roots of Book of Mormon Names,” FARMS Preliminary Report CAR-81 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1982); *HALOT*, 62–65.

Samuel then uses language that again recalls his prophetic use of “hear” (Hebrew *šāmaʿ*, Egyptian *śdm*) and exploits the phonological similarity between *šēmûʿēl* and that verb: “And ye shall hear my words, for for this intent I have come up upon the walls of this city, *that ye might hear and know of the judgments of God* which do await you because of your iniquities, and also that ye might know the conditions of *repentance*” (Helaman 14:11). Samuel presents himself as one of the raised-up prophets “like unto” Moses and typifying of Christ, whom his Nephite-Israelite brethren must “hear” (Deuteronomy 18:15–19; cf. 1 Nephi 22:20; 3 Nephi 20:23).

Although “ye shall hear” might be understood with the deontic modality of “ye must hear,” the force of Samuel’s evident use of *šāmaʿ* in the first instance comes across even stronger than an imperative: the Nephites of Zarahemla are going to “hear” Samuel, regardless of whether they desire to do so. In the second instance, “hear” as used in the purpose clause, emphasizes that Nephites’ hearing the imminent and longer-term judgments of God and knowing how to avert them (“the conditions of repentance”)⁴¹ is requisite with his justice (cf., e.g., Amos 3:7).

All of this sets the stage for additional purpose clauses, two of which, like Helaman 14:2, include the onomastic elements in *šēmûʿēl*: “and also that ye might know of the coming of Jesus Christ *the Son of God, the Father of heaven* [*šāmayim*] and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning, and that ye might know of the signs of his coming, *to the intent that ye might believe on his name* [*šēmō*]” (Helaman 14:12).⁴² The noun *šāmayim* (“heaven”) adds paronomastic flavor to the wordplay on *šēmûʿēl* similar to the paronomasia of Genesis 11:4: “let us build a city,

41. In addition to Samuel’s use of it in Helaman 14:11, the collocation “conditions of repentance” occurs in the Book of Mormon in Alma 17:15 (used by Mormon); 42:13 (used by Alma the Younger), and in Helaman 5:11 (used by Helaman, the son of Helaman). See also two instances in the Doctrine and Covenants: D&C 18:12; 138:19.

42. Interestingly, the formula “Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning” evokes the biblical titular formula *ʿēl ʿelyôn qōnē šāmayim wāʾāreš* “the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth:” (Genesis 14:19, 22; cf. Acts 4:24). The divine name Elk=kener/Elkenah constitutes a shortened form of a similar name-title. See Kevin Barney, “On Elkenah as Canaanite El,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 19, no. 1 (2010): 22–35. The Hebrew personal name Elkanah (Hebrew, *ʿelqānā*; Exodus 6:24, 1 Samuel 1:1, 4) represents a similar hypocoristicon and is the name of father of the biblical prophet Samuel. The Book of Mormon onomasticon entry for Elkenah notes that “the Egyptian equivalent would have been *qm; wnnt* ‘Creator of that which is.’” *The Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, s.v. “Elkenah,” <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/ELKENAH>.

and a tower, with its top in heaven [*šāmayim*], and let us make us a name [*šēm*, reputation, monument, memorial].”

Since, as he had stated previously, the Son of God was specifically coming to “redeem all those who believe on *his name*,” Samuel knew it was necessary to persuade these Nephites to activate the blessings of Christ’s atonement through faith “on his name” and living in obedience to the doctrine of Christ. The name *šēmû’ēl* — “His name is El” or the name he calls upon or invokes in worship⁴³ — implied saving faith or belief resident in the one so named. In other words, the meaning of the name Samuel itself encapsulates the doctrine of Christ, from faith in Jesus Christ to salvation in the kingdom of God. Thus, Samuel and his name — a name declared at the outset of his sermon — stood before the Nephites as an example and a symbol. The Nephites collectively had failed to glorify God and his “name” and thus embody the “good” they believed to be implied in the name Nephites, the “good” that their ancestor Nephi described as the doctrine of Christ (see 2 Nephi 31–33).

“And If Ye Will Believe On His Name ...”

A conditional clause follows immediately on the heels of Samuel’s purpose clause, the language again playing on his name: “*And if ye believe on his name* [*šēmô*], ye will repent of all your sins, that thereby ye may have a remission of them through his merits” (Helaman 14:13). This conditional clause constitutes a meristic reference to the doctrine of Christ⁴⁴ and alludes directly to Nephi’s original exposition of that doctrine. For example, the “remission” of sins through “repent[ing] of all your sins” that Samuel mentions has reference to Nephi’s description of repentance and baptism as the “gate” of “the way” of life and salvation: “For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water, and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost. And then are ye in this straight [or strait] and narrow path which leads to eternal life, yea, ye have entered in by the gate. Ye have done according to the commandments of the Father and the Son” (2 Nephi 31:17–18).⁴⁵

Nephi had included “the commandments of the Father and the Son” when he quoted them previously in his text, commandments which emphasize the importance of the “name” (*šēm*) of the Son: “And the Father saith: Repent ye, repent ye, and be baptized in the *name* of my

43. Cf. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 62.

44. Reynolds, “Biblical Merismus in Book of Mormon Gospel References,” 128.

45. Previous to 2 Nephi 31:17, Nephi first uses the term translated “remission” in 2 Nephi 25:26.

Beloved Son. And also, the voice of the Son came unto me, saying: He that is baptized *in my name*, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost like unto me" (2 Nephi 31:11–12). Nephi describes baptism as the means of taking upon oneself the "name" ("ye are willing to take upon you *the name* of Christ by baptism," 2 Nephi 31:13) and concludes regarding "the doctrine of Christ" and the "name" that "this is the way. And there is none other way nor *name* given under *heaven* whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God" (2 Nephi 31:21; see also above).⁴⁶

Additionally, Samuel's use of the phrase "through his merits" alludes to 2 Nephi 31:19: "ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon *the merits* of him who is mighty to save."⁴⁷ In terms of Lamanite conversion history, the phrase "through his merits" had another important intertextual reference: the royal speech of Anti-Nephi-Lehi (Alma 24:7–16). Samuel was very likely the descendant of Lamanites who heard this speech and perhaps a descendant of king Anti-Nephi-Lehi himself. Anti-Nephi-Lehi exclaimed:

And I also thank my God, yea, my great God, that he hath granted unto us that we might repent of these things, and also that he hath forgiven us of these our many sins and murders which we have committed and took away the guilt from our hearts *through the merits of his Son*. And now behold, my brethren, since it has been *all that we could do*, as we were the most lost of all mankind, to repent of all our sins and the many murders which we have committed and to get God to take them away from our hearts — for it was *all we could do* to repent sufficiently before God that he would take away our stains. (Alma 24:10–11)

This again takes us back to Nephi's statements on the doctrine of Christ: "For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children and also our brethren to believe in Christ and to be reconciled to God, for we know that it is by grace that we are saved after all we can do" (2 Nephi 25:23). As Robert L. Millet has noted, Alma 24:10–11 sheds light

46. For useful study of "name"-theology, see Truman G. Madsen, "Putting on the Names: A Jewish-Christian Legacy," in *By Study and Also By Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, eds. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 1:458–81.

47. The noun "merits" occurs first in Lehi's parenthesis to his son Jacob (2 Nephi 2:8). Nephi uses it first in direct connection to the doctrine of Christ in 2 Nephi 31:19.

on what Nephi’s use of the much debated phrase “all we can do” means.⁴⁸ Namely, in one sense “all we can do” is “repent sufficiently before God.” Against the backdrop of 2 Nephi 23:25, Alma 24:10–11, and 2 Nephi 31, Samuel’s subsequent statement takes even more striking significance: “Therefore repent ye, repent ye, lest by knowing these things and *not doing them*, ye shall suffer yourselves to come under condemnation and ye are brought down unto this second death” (Helaman 14:19).

The second part of Samuel’s prophecy concludes with an additional meristic allusion to the doctrine of Christ.⁴⁹ This conclusion looks forward to the signs that would signify the Son of God glorifying the name of the Father and the climactic events of 3 Nephi 11–27, in which Jesus further glorified the name of the Father. In Helaman 14:25, Mormon preserves Samuel’s prophecy regarding the post-resurrection appearance of many of the righteous dead, the same prophecy that Jesus had chided his Nephite disciples for failing to record. Samuel then, according to Mormon’s record, predicts the signs that would attend the Messiah’s death (vv. 26–27). Samuel also makes a laconic reference to Jesus’s post-mortal ministry among the Lamanites and Nephites beginning at the temple in Bountiful:

And the angel said unto me that many shall see greater things than these, to the intent that they might *believe* — that these signs and these wonders should come to pass upon all the face of this land, to the intent that there should be *no cause for unbelief* among the children of men — and this *to the intent that whosoever will believe might be saved and that whosoever will not believe, a righteous judgment might come upon them*; and also if they are condemned, they bring upon themselves their own condemnation. (Helaman 14:28–29)

In addition to echoing the earlier purpose clause in v. 13 (“to the intent that ye may believe on his name”), the purpose clause “to the intent that whosoever will believe might be saved” constitutes yet another meristic description of the doctrine of Christ,⁵⁰ which encapsulates that doctrine as Jesus teaches it in 3 Nephi 11–27, especially in 3 Nephi 11:11–40 and 27:2–22.

48. Robert L. Millet, *After All We Can Do ... Grace Works* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 131–32. For more on exegetical issues pertaining to 2 Nephi 25:23, see Joseph M. Spencer, “What Can We Do? Reflections on 2 Nephi 25:23,” *Religious Educator* 15, no. 2 (2014): 25–39.

49. Reynolds, “Biblical Merismus in Book of Mormon Gospel References,” 128.

50. *Ibid.*

Samuel’s apparent repeated use of forms of the verbal root *’mn* in the phrases “that they might believe,” “no cause for unbelief,” “whosoever will believe,” and “whosoever will not believe” unavoidably returns the historical Nephite pejorative association of the Lamanites with “unbelief” to the forefront of his speech. His Nephite audience could not have failed to appreciate the high irony of a Lamanite prophet warning Nephites — “the goodly” or “fair ones” who had been “chosen on account of their faith” — against “unbelief” and the “righteous judgment” that would come upon “whosoever will not believe.” As noted previously, the major point — maybe the entire point — of the last part of Samuel’s speech (Helaman 15) is that the converted Lamanites had come to embody faith and faithfulness in spite of past unbelief (vv. 11, 15), while the Nephites had become those who had dwindled in “unbelief” (see especially v. 17).

Almost certainly, Samuel had been born to “faithful” Lamanite parents whose grandparents or great-grandparents had been among those Lamanites who had believed in the preaching of Ammon, Aaron, et al. (see Alma 17–28). These parents consciously bestowed the name of an ancient Israelite prophet — one of the greatest — on their son, who would become a prophet. It is also not unlikely that they knew what this name meant in their scriptural tradition. Again, worth noting is that the kerygmatic phrase “believe on his name,” attested first in Nephi’s writings on the small plates (2 Nephi 23:13–14), is attested frequently in and in connection with the Lamanite conversions (see Alma 19:13, 36; 22:13; 26:35). Samuel’s name — *šēmû’ēl* — thus appropriately echoes the events surrounding his ancestors’ conversion as well as constituting a key part of his preaching (see again Helaman 14:2, 12–13). His ancestors had responded to the preaching of Nephite missionaries and had activated the blessings of Christ’s atonement and the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant by living the doctrine of Christ, beginning with “believ[ing] on his name.” Samuel now returned as a descendant of these Lamanite converts to call the Nephites back to doing the same.

“There Were Many Who Heard the Words of Samuel”:

Activating the Doctrine of Christ and the Atonement of Christ

At the conclusion of his presentation of Samuel’s speech (Helaman 13–15), Mormon devotes substantial attention to describing the reaction the speech engendered. Mormon first describes those who immediately respond in faith to Samuel’s message as well as those who initially disbelieve but subsequently believe. Significantly, the response of faith consisted of obedience to the doctrine of Christ:

And now it came to pass that *there were many which heard the words of Samuel the Lamanite* which he spake upon the walls of the city. And as many as *believed on his words* went forth and sought for Nephi. And when they had come forth and found him, they *confessed unto him their sins* [i.e., repented] and denied not, *desiring that they might be baptized unto the Lord*. But as many as there were which *did not believe in the words of Samuel* were angry with him. And they cast stones at him upon the wall, and also many shot arrows at him as he stood upon the wall. But *the Spirit of the Lord was with him*, insomuch that they could not hit him with their stones neither with their arrows. Now when they saw this, that they could not hit him, *there were many more which did believe on his words*, insomuch that they went away unto Nephi to be *baptized*. For behold, Nephi was *baptizing* and a prophesying and preaching, crying *repentance* unto the people, shewing signs and wonders, working miracles among the people, that they might know that the Christ must shortly come, telling them of things which must shortly come, that they might know and remember at the time of their coming that they had been made known unto them beforehand, *to the intent that they might believe*. Therefore as many as *believed on the words of Samuel* went forth unto him to be baptized, for they came repenting and confessing their sins. (Helaman 16:1–8)

In this passage, Mormon’s use of the phrase “believed on the words of Samuel [šēmû’ēl]” echoes Samuel’s refrain “believe on *his name* [šēmô].” Mormon’s initial mention of the “many” who “heard the words of Samuel,” again appears to juxtapose the verb *šāma’* with *šēmû’ēl* as play on the prophet’s name in a way that further connects it with earlier uses of *šāma’* as a proclamation formula (see earlier). Those who “believed on the word of Samuel,” in so doing, exercised *faith* in Jesus Christ, thus activating the doctrine of Christ and the blessings of his atonement. Their repentance consisted of seeking out Nephi and “confess[ing] unto him their sins.” A key point here is that the faith and repentance of these people led straightway to their baptism at the hands of a prophetic-priestly authority. Although Samuel had invoked the doctrine of Christ only in meristic fashion, “hearing” (i.e., obedient) Nephites seem to have known that doctrine so well as to understand Samuel’s words as an invitation and summons to baptism.

Moreover, in stating that “the Spirit of the Lord was with him,” Mormon characterizes Samuel the Lamanite as a prophet “legitimated”⁵¹ by the Lord. The biblical prophet Samuel’s legitimation in 1 Samuel 3:19 finds expression in nearly identical terms: “and the Lord was with him.” This legitimation stands in stark contrast to the de-legitimation of the Nephites, whose covenant delinquency has progressed to the point that they seek the life a true prophet.⁵²

Nephi the son of Helaman, for his part, did many of the same things Samuel did. He declared the doctrine of Christ, prophesied of the coming of Christ, and showed signs and wonders to the Nephites in advance of that event. Both had been “prepar[ing] the way of the Lord” among the Nephites in the most meaningful sense of that expression — like John the Baptist had done in his sphere⁵³ — all this “to the intent that they [the Nephites] might believe” and activate the blessings of the atonement of Jesus Christ through obedience to his doctrine.

A final literary echo of the name Samuel in the Book of Helaman accompanies Samuel the Lamanite’s departure from Mormon’s narrative:

But *the more part of them did not believe in the words of Samuel*. Therefore when they saw that they could not hit him with their stones and their arrows, they cried unto their captains, saying: Take this fellow and bind him. For behold, he hath a devil; and because of the power of the devil which is in him, we cannot hit him with our stones and our arrows. Therefore take him and bind him and away with him. And as they went forth to lay their hands on him, behold, he did cast himself down from the wall, and did flee out of their lands,

51. David Wagner, *Geist und Tora: Studien zur göttlichen Legitimation und Delegitimation von Herrschaft im Alten Testament anhand der Erzählungen über König Saul* (Leipzig, DEU Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2005), 189–216.

52. Cf., e.g., Israel’s covenant delinquency as described by Elijah in 1 Kings 19:10, 14: “And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for *the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant*, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and *they seek my life, to take it away*.” Cf. the inhabitants of Jerusalem at the time Lehi was called to be a prophet (see 1 Nephi 1:20; 2:1, 13; 7:14; 17:44) and Laman and Lemuel et al.’s negative progression in 1 Nephi 2:13; 7:16; 17:44; 2 Nephi 1:24; 5:2–4. King Noah and his people similarly sought the prophet Abinadi’s life and manifest similar covenant delinquency (see Mosiah 11:26). The JST Genesis account describes the people to whom Noah the patriarch preached in similar terms (Moses 8:18, 26).

53. See Isaiah 40:3, quoted by all three “synoptic” evangelists (Mark 1:3; Matthew 3:3; Luke 4:3).

yea, even unto his own country, and began to preach and to prophesy among his own people. And behold, *he was never heard of more* among the Nephites. And thus were the affairs of the people. (Helaman 16:6–8)

“Not believ[ing] in the words of Samuel” was tantamount to “not believing in [the] name [šēmô]” of the Son of God. The “more part” of the Nephites have become the embodiment of everything for which they had traditionally criticized and loathed the Lamanites: the Nephites were now the unfaithful or those who had “dwindled in unbelief.” Samuel responds to the persistent Nephite effort to dispose of (or kill) him by fleeing home “unto his own country.” Mormon’s assertion that “he [Samuel] was “never heard of more” echoes the name Samuel in terms of the similar-sounding verb *šāmaʿ*, “hear.”

**“I Will Fulfill All That Which I Have Caused to Be Spoken
by the Mouth of My Holy Prophets”:**

The Fulfillment of Samuel’s Word and the Doctrine of Christ

Mormon makes a major point of demonstrating that Samuel the Lamanite’s prophecies regarding the birth of the Messiah and the signs attending this event came to complete fulfillment. The questions among the Nephites five years after Samuel’s prophecy, as Mormon presents it, were whether Samuel’s words could still be fulfilled and, more than implicitly, was he a true prophet?

But there were some who began to say that the time was past for the words to be fulfilled, which were *spoken by Samuel, the Lamanite*. And they began to rejoice over their brethren, saying: Behold the time is past, and the words of *Samuel* are not fulfilled; therefore, your joy and your *faith* concerning this thing hath been vain. And it came to pass that they did make a great uproar throughout the land; and the people who *believed* began to be very sorrowful, lest by any means those things which had been spoken might not come to pass. But behold, *they did watch steadfastly* for that day and that night and that day which should be as one day as if there were no night, that they might know that their *faith* had not been vain. Now it came to pass that there was a day set apart by *the unbelievers*, that *all those who believed* in those traditions should be put to death except the sign should come to pass, which had been given by *Samuel the prophet*. (3 Nephi 1:6–9)

Mormon's use of the terms *Lamanite*, *faith*, *believed*, and *steadfastly* keep his audience immersed in issues of the traditional Nephite polemic against the Lamanites as *lō'-'ēmun* as described above. Now a Lamanite prophet, rather than one in the Nephite tradition, has authoritatively laid down the terms on which true faith and belief will emerge. The old ethnic distinctions are breaking down (as becomes clear in 3 Nephi 2:14–16). Here, the “believers” or the “faithful” are those who “believed” in the “words” of Samuel” and the traditions regarding the Messiah’s coming. Those who believe in Samuel’s prophecies, believe on the one who sent him — and thus “believe on his name” (Helaman 14:2, 12–13). These are the ones practicing the doctrine of Christ.

In the microcosm of this pericope which culminates in the fulfillment of Samuel’s prophecies, the faithful who “watch steadfastly” for the signs of the Messiah’s birth, in so doing apply the fifth principle of the gospel: to “endure to the end” (cf. “ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ ... and endure to the end,” 2 Nephi 31:20). Their faith and faithfulness to the “end” find marvelous vindication when “that day and that night and that day” finally come to pass and the word comes to Nephi:

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, *to show unto the world that I will fulfil all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets*. Behold, *I come unto my own to fulfil all things which I have made known unto the children of men from the foundation of the world*, and to do the will of the Father and of the Son — of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh. And behold, the time is at hand, and this night shall the sign be given. (3 Nephi 1:13–14)

Afterward, what is said of Samuel the prophet in the biblical book of Samuel becomes applicable to Samuel the Lamanite prophet: “... and *the Lord was with him*, and did let none of his words fall to the ground” (1 Samuel 3:19). What the biblical writer says of the earlier Samuel takes on special poignancy when applied to Samuel the Lamanite in the context of pejorative Nephite views of the Lamanites: “Samuel *was established [ne'ēmān, confirmed, verified, proven (faithful) < *'mn]* to be a prophet of the Lord” (1 Samuel 3:20). Samuel the Lamanite’s words were proven “faithful” or “true” vis-à-vis the words of his Nephite critics “who had not believed the words of the prophets” (3 Nephi 1:16) and had dwindled in “unbelief” (Helaman 15:17).

“They Were Heard to Cry and Mourn”

Mormon brings Samuel the Lamanite to the forefront of his narrative again in 3 Nephi 8 as he chronicles the imminent fulfillment of Samuel the Lamanite’s prophecy concerning the death of Jesus Christ. It had been thirty-three years from the time of the sign of the birth of the Son of God (see 3 Nephi 8:2).⁵⁴ Here Mormon states that “the people began to look with great earnestness for the sign which had been given by *the prophet Samuel* the Lamanite, yea, for the time that there should be darkness for the space of three days over the face of the land” (3 Nephi 8:3). Mormon demonstrates that not only did the signs come to pass, but also that the people cried out with the very words that Samuel said they would cry:

And it came to pass that it did last for the space of three days that there was no light seen. And there was great mourning and *howling and weeping* among all the people continually; yea, great were the groanings of the people because of the darkness and the great destruction which had come upon them. And *in one place they were heard to cry*, saying: *O that we had repented before this great and terrible day*, and then would our brethren have been spared and they would not have been burned in that great city Zarahemla. And in another place *they were heard to cry and mourn*, saying: *O that we had repented before this great and terrible day and had not killed and stoned the prophets and cast them out*, then would our mothers and our fair daughters and our children have been spared, and not have been buried up in that great city Moronihah. And thus were the *howlings* of the people great and terrible. (3 Nephi 8:23–25)

“Howling and weeping” fulfilled Samuel’s prophecy in Helaman 13:32: “then shall ye weep and howl in that day, saith the Lord of Hosts.” The phrases “they were heard to cry” and “they were heard to cry and mourn” (“and ... they were heard” — cf. Hebrew *wayyishšām’ ū*)⁵⁵ recalls the name of the giver of these signs and prophecies which were, at that hour, being fulfilled — the name of the prophet whom they had refused to “hear” (*šāma’*), Samuel. Moreover, Mormon’s imputation of the words “O that we had repented before this great and terrible day and had not killed the prophets and cast them out” to the people constitutes

54. 3 Nephi 8:2: “And now it came to pass, if there was no mistake made by this man in the reckoning of our time, the thirty and third year had passed away.”

55. See, e.g., 1 Samuel 17:31.

an almost verbatim replication of the words that Samuel had predicted would be on the mouths of the Nephites:

O that I had repented and had not killed the prophets and stoned them and cast them out. Yea, in that day ye shall say: O that we had remembered the Lord our God in the day that he gave us our riches, and then they would not have become slippery, that we should lose them. For behold, our riches are gone from us. Behold, we layeth a tool here, and on the morrow it is gone. And behold, our swords are taken from us in the day we have sought them for battle. Yea, we have hid up our treasures, and they have slipped away from us because of the curse of the land. O that we had repented in the day that the word of the Lord came unto us. For behold, the land is cursed; and all things are become slippery and we cannot hold them. Behold, we are surrounded by demons; yea, we are encircled about by the angels of him who hath sought to destroy our souls. Behold, our iniquities are great. O Lord, canst thou not turn away thine anger from us? And this shall be your language in them days. But behold, your days of probation is past. Ye have procrastinated the day of your salvation until it is everlastingly too late and your destruction is made sure. Yea, for ye have sought all the days of your lives for that which ye could not obtain. And ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and eternal Head. O ye people of the land, that ye would hear my words! And I pray that the anger of the Lord be turned away from you and that ye would repent and be saved. (Helaman 13:33–39)

The Nephites had been “encircled about by the angels of him who hath sought to destroy [their] souls” and “[their] iniquities [had been] great”; or, as the voice of Christ later described the fulfillment of Samuel’s words thus: “the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of the fair⁵⁶ sons and daughters of my people; and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen!” (3 Nephi 9:2). The Nephites of Mormon’s time replicate the failure of the majority of the Nephites to “hear” Samuel during his time. Thus they could not activate the blessings of the doctrine of Christ and “be saved.”

56. Bowen, “O Ye Fair Ones,” 2–3; Bowen, “O Ye Fair Ones – Revisited,” 332, 334–35.

Mormon records the fulfillment of Samuel the Lamanite’s prophecies again during his own time. The Nephites again were surrounded by evil and “the power of the evil one”:

And these Gaddianton robbers, which were among the Lamanites, did infest the land, insomuch that the *inhabitants thereof began to hide up their treasures in the earth; and they became slippery because the Lord had cursed the land, that they could not hold them nor retain them again*. And it came to pass that there were sorceries and witchcrafts and magics; and the power of the evil one was wrought upon all the face of the land, *even unto the fulfilling of all the words of Abinadi and also Samuel the Lamanite*. (Mormon 1:18–19)

Not only did the possessions of the Nephites become “slippery,” The Nephites mourned and lamented again as they had at the time of the death of Christ:

And it came to pass that the Nephites began to repent of their iniquity and *began to cry, even as had been prophesied by Samuel the prophet*. For behold, no man could keep that which was his own for the thieves and the robber, and the murderers and the magic art and the witchcraft which was in the land. Thus *there began to be a mourning and a lamentation in all the land because of these things, and more especially among the people of Nephi*. And it came to pass that when I Mormon saw their lamentation and their mourning and their sorrow before the Lord, my heart did begin to rejoice within me, knowing the mercies and the long-suffering of the Lord, therefore supposing that he would be merciful unto them, that they would again become a righteous people. But behold, this my joy was vain; for *their sorrowing was not unto repentance because of the goodness of God, but it was rather the sorrowing of the damned because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin*. (Mormon 2:10–13)

The Nephites’ abortive repentance at this closing stage in their history meant they would not be “saved” collectively, neither — for the most part — individually. Mormon directly alludes to Samuel’s speech to the Nephites who “sought for happiness in doing iniquity” (Helaman 13:18) when he asserted that the Nephites did not want to complete their repentance “because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin” (Mormon 10:13). In other words,

the inverse of Alma’s corollary “wickedness never was happiness”⁵⁷ — i.e., the idea that one can “eat, drink, and be merry; [but] nevertheless fear God”⁵⁸ — constitutes a doctrine incompatible with the doctrine of Christ and “the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and eternal Head” (Helaman 13:38). The Nephites not only ceased to “fear God,” but also “they did curse God and wish to die. Nevertheless they would struggle with the sword for their lives” (Mormon 2:14).

Conclusion

The wordplay on Samuel in Helaman 14:2, 12–13 and 3 Nephi 23:9 approaches more nearly the actual etymology of the name Samuel (*šēmû’ēl*) than most of the literary wordplay on Samuel that occurs in the Samuel-Saul cycle in the Hebrew Bible. The meaning and symbolism of *šēmû’ēl* (“his-name-is-El,” i.e., a *šēm* which glorifies *’ēl*), Samuel’s rhetorical wordplay on his own name, and Jesus’s wordplay on his name all converge in Moroni’s meristic description of the doctrine of Christ: “but because of the *faith* of men he has shewn himself unto the world and *glorified the name* [*šēm*] of the Father and prepared a way that thereby others might be partakers of the heavenly gift, that they might hope for those things which they have not seen” (Ether 12:8).

Samuel’s prophecies emphasized “believ[ing] on the name” of the Son of God (Helaman 14:2, 12–13) and the signs that would mark the latter’s coming in mortality when the Son would “glorify the name of the Father” and the Father would “glorify his name” in his son Jesus Christ (3 Nephi 23:9). Jesus had testified regarding the prophets in ancient Israelite tradition, “Verily I say unto you: Yea, *and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have testified of me*” (3 Nephi 20:24). One of those prophets “that follow[ed] after” was Samuel the Lamanite. In the case of Samuel, truly *nomen est omen* — the name is the sign. Samuel’s name constitutes a most appropriate sign — a sign that not only would Jesus fulfill all the words of the prophets concerning him (3 Nephi 1:14), but also a sign that he himself would “glorify the name of the Father” in all things (Ether 12:8; cf. 3:21; 3 Nephi 11:11), and a sign that the Father would fully “glorify his name” in him (3 Nephi 9:15; 11:7; 23:9).

57. Both Samuel and Mormon owe their statements to Alma the Younger, who explained to his son Corianton: Alma 41:10: “Do not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold, I say unto you, wickedness never was happiness.”

58. 2 Nephi 28:8.

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Matthew L. Bowen *was raised in Orem, Utah, and graduated from Brigham Young University. He holds a PhD in Biblical Studies from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, and is currently an associate professor in religious education at Brigham Young University-Hawaii. He is also the author of* Name as Key-Word: Collected Essays on Onomastic Wordplay *and The Temple in Mormon Scripture (Salt Lake City: Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2018). He and his wife (the former Suzanne Blattberg) are the parents of three children: Zachariah, Nathan, and Adele.*