

Samuel's Five-year Prophecy Fulfilled

Randall P. Spackman

Four elements of Samuel's prophecy of the Messiah's birth were identified in the chronological segment of the prophecy (Helaman 14:2-6).¹ Three specific elements each were designated as "a sign." The first was that "five years more cometh" and then the Messiah would be born (Helaman 14:2). This element was interpreted to mean that five complete years, counted with an as yet unidentified calendar, would pass away before the advent of the Messiah.

The next element identified as a specific sign was that "in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness" (Helaman 14:3). This night without darkness would have five aspects. First, the sun would be seen to rise on the day before the Messiah's birth. Second, the sun would be seen to set on the night before his advent. Third, the sun would be seen to rise on the day of his birth. All this direct observation of the sun, rising and setting and rising again in its proper order, would occur so that the Nephites would "know of a surety" that there were "two days and a night" or "one day and a night and a day" (Helaman 14:4). The fourth aspect of the night without darkness would be "great lights in heaven" and "a new star" (Helaman 14:3, 5). Fifth, the illumination from the great lights and new star (and perhaps other signs and wonders; Helaman 14:6) would be so great, the night would be "as if it was day" (Helaman 14:3).

The third element identified by Samuel as a sign was that "a new star [shall] arise," apparently during the night without darkness. However, as a continuing phenomenon, the new star likely would have been expected to appear during the night following the Messiah's birth and on subsequent nights. The new star was to be "such an one as ye never have beheld" (Helaman 14:5). Thus, Samuel's prophesied new star may have been understood by the believers to fulfill Nephi's prophecy of a sign of the Messiah's birth that would appear "after the Messiah shall come" (2 Nephi 26:3).

The fourth general element of the prophecy (the one not identified as a specific sign) was that "there shall be many signs and wonders in heaven" (Helaman 14:6). This general element was interpreted as suggesting portents of the pending birth of the Messiah the next day. Some might be miracles, such as visions of heavenly beings or pronouncements to be heard from heaven. Others might involve constellations of stars perhaps understood as being associated, although probably not seen, with the great lights or new star on the night before his birth. The expectation to be associated with this element seems broad and uncertain.

These four elements of Samuel's five-year prophecy now will be examined from the perspective of fulfillment. Mormon could examine Nephite records associated with the prophecy and its fulfillment (e.g., Words of Mormon 1:3-9; Mormon 2:17-18; 6:6). Hence, his narrative of the prophecy might be expected to track closely his narrative of its fulfillment.

Five Years More. In the commencement of the 92nd year of the judges,² Lachoneus governed as chief judge in the land of Zarahemla (3 Nephi 1:1). He would rule for many years and be esteemed "a just man" and "a great prophet" (3 Nephi 3:12, 19; 6:17, 19). Nephi led the

¹ See part two, "The Five-year Prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite," in the chapter on "Chronological Structure."

² The term *commencement* (28 instances) appears to have a calendric meaning. See the examination of this issue in the chapter on "Calendars."

believers in Christ as the newly appointed successor to his father, Nephi, who was revered as “a great prophet, and a man of God” (Helaman 11:18; 3 Nephi, preface; 1:1-3). At that time, a call for revolt swept the land of Zarahemla (3 Nephi 1:4-8). The stated justification for the unrest was not Lehi’s 600-year prophecy (1 Nephi 10:4; 19:7-8; 2 Nephi 25:19) nor was it Nephi’s related prophecy that “signs ... of his birth, and also of his death and resurrection” would be given to the Nephite people “after the Messiah shall come” (2 Nephi 26:3). The insurrection appears to have been triggered by Samuel the Lamanite’s five-year prophecy of signs in the heavens. The first three stanzas of this segment describe this justification and the growing conflict (3 Nephi 1:4-6, structure and italics added):

And it came to pass that
A_{1A} in the *commencement*
A_{1B} of the ninety and second *year*,
B_{1A} behold, the *prophecies*
B_{1B} of the *prophets*
C_{1A} began to be *fulfilled*
C_{1B} more *fully*,
D_{1A} for there began to be *greater signs*
D_{1B} and *greater miracles* wrought among the people.

B_{2A} But there were some *which began to say*,
A_{2A} That *the time was past*
C_{2A} for the words *to be fulfilled*,
B_{3A} which was *spoken by Samuel, the Lamanite*.

B_{2B} And *they began to rejoice* over their brethren, saying,
A_{2B} Behold, *the time is past*,
C_{2B} and the words of Samuel *are not fulfilled*;
D_{2A} therefore, *your joy*
D_{2B} and *your faith concerning this thing*,
C_{2C} hath been *vain*.³

The “A” lines refer to chronological topics: commencement, year and time. “B” lines are about the conflict between groups with different prophetic beliefs: the “people which believed” (3 Nephi 1:7), who held to the words of Samuel, and the “unbelievers” (3 Nephi 1:9), who began to rejoice over the believers. The “C” lines focus on completion: the prophecy of Samuel being either fulfilled fully or merely empty, worthless words. “D” lines refer to the joy, faith, signs and miracles

³ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling are as set forth in Joseph Smith, Jr., author and proprietor, *The Book of Mormon* (Palmyra, New York: E.B. Grandin, 1830; Independence, Missouri: Herald Heritage Reprint, 1970), 452; or Wilford C. Wood, *Joseph Smith Begins His Work: Book of Mormon 1830 First Edition Reproduced from Uncut Sheets* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Publisher’s Press, 1958), 452. For this part of the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, the typesetter apparently worked directly from the original manuscript rather than from the printer’s manuscript. Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [“FARMS”], 2001), 6; idem, *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts, Part One* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001), 3-4. The wording of the printer’s manuscript, which also was copied from the original manuscript, is the same as the 1830 edition. Royal Skousen, ed., *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts, Part Two* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001), 777-78. There are no material interpretive issues related to the textual transmission of these verses. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2008), 3180-81.

that attended the believers during this time of great hope. Thus, the “unbelievers” began to advance their belief that the Lamanite had been a false prophet.

The introductory stanza for this segment contains a specific chronological statement that describes the fulfillment of the first of Samuel’s four prophetic elements. Mormon noted that the events occurred “in the commencement of the ninety and second year” (3 Nephi 1:4). Samuel delivered the five-year prophecy during the 86th year of the judges. By the end of the 91st year, five complete Nephite years (the 87th through 91st years of the judges) had passed away since Samuel had pronounced the angel’s message (Helaman 13:1-2; 14:2-6; 16:8-12, 24; 3 Nephi 1:1). Thus, it would appear that “five years more” had passed away without anyone seeing signs and wonders in the heavens to herald the Messiah’s birth. The concluding stanzas of this segment summarize the escalation of hostility (3 Nephi 1:7-9, structure and italics added):

And it came to pass that
B_{2C} *they did make a great uproar* throughout the land;
D_{3A} and the people which *believed*,
D_{3B} began to be very *sorrowful*,
B_{3B} lest by any means *those things which had been spoken*,
C_{3A} *might not come to pass*.
B_{3C} But behold, they did *watch steadfastly*
A_{3A} for *that day*,
A_{3B} and *that night*,
A_{3C} and *that day*,
A_{3D} which shall be as one *day*,
A_{3E} as if there were no *night*,
D_{4A} that they might *know*
D_{4B} that their *faith*
C_{3B} had not been *vain*.

Now it came to pass that
A_{3F} there was a *day*
B_{2D} *set apart by the unbelievers*,
B_{3D} that all those who believed in *those traditions*,
C_{4A} *should be put to death*,
C_{4B} except the sign *should come to pass*,
B_{3E} which had been *given by Samuel the prophet*.⁴

The “A” lines continue to refer to chronological matters: the specific days and night prophesied by Samuel versus the day expected by the unbelievers. The “B” lines persist with the conflict between prophetic messages. The unbelievers created a great uproar throughout the land. They planned a religious purge, which had sweeping political implications because the chief judge

⁴ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 452-53. This part of the 1830 edition also was evidently copied from the original manuscript rather than from the printer’s manuscript. Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 6; idem, *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part One*, 3-4. The wording of the printer’s manuscript is the same as the 1830 edition, except for the word *shall* in line A_{3D}. Skousen, ed., *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part Two*, 778. “The printer’s manuscript has the past-tense modal *should*, while the 1830 edition has the present-tense modal *shall*. The whole passage otherwise uses past-tense verb forms (*did watch*, *were*, *might know*, *had not been*); this consistency supports the use of *should* rather than *shall*... [T]here is considerable evidence that the 1830 typesetter tended to replace *should* with *shall* if the context referred to a future event...” Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five*, 3181-83.

was a believer. The believers watched steadfastly for the night without darkness. The “C” lines contrast two types of completion: either the sign occurring or death for the believers. Again, the “D” lines refer to the believers’ faith in the angel’s words to Samuel about a night without darkness, sorrow at the unbelievers’ great uproar and threats of murder, and hope for knowledge that their faith in God had saved them.

Samuel had stated with certainty, “five years more cometh, and behold, then cometh the Son of God to redeem all those who shall believe on his name” (Helaman 14:2). The unbelievers used their own certainty to deride the believers, “Behold, the time is past, and the words of Samuel are not fulfilled” (3 Nephi 1:6). The unbelievers’ religious hostility and political (and, thus, economic) craving served as motives for their claim (see, e.g., Helaman 16:15-23). In their eyes, Samuel had said, “Five more years of the judges will pass and then, immediately, the sign in heaven will appear” or, perhaps, “Five more years of Lehi’s era will pass and then, without delay, the sign will be given.” The unbelievers intentionally sought to create confusion among, and conflict with, the believers in Christ, who were a minority in the land of Zarahemla (Helaman 16:10).

At the same time, the believers were filled with joy and faith concerning the imminent appearance of Samuel’s prophesied signs (3 Nephi 1:6). Their “traditions” (compare 3 Nephi 1:9 and 11) included the prophecy that 600 years of Lehi’s era would pass away before the Messiah’s birth. They knew that prophecy would be fulfilled in the commencement of the 92nd year of the judges (see, e.g., Mosiah 29:44, 46; 3 Nephi 1:1). The devotion and labors of the believers and their “wise men” (see, e.g., Helaman 16:3-4, 13-15) were accompanied by more signs and miracles among the believers (3 Nephi 1:4). Even after the derision began, the believers “did watch steadfastly” for Samuel’s sign (3 Nephi 1:8). They believed the sign *would come* in fulfillment of their tradition and *might come* with each new night.

For some reason, the leaders of the revolt did not call for immediate insurrection. Instead, “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 1:9). Even though the uproar was great throughout the land and the date of the planned purge was no secret, the unbelievers apparently did not (at least in general) attack their neighbors before the “day set apart” for murder.

Did the revolutionaries merely need additional time to organize and build support for the revolt? Did the believers unite under Lachoneus, Nephi or others, so as to defend themselves? Did false prophets announce an ostensibly propitious time to unleash the unbelievers’ murders? How long did the revolutionaries wait to advance their insurrection after the 92nd year of the judges began? Was there confusion concerning which year-counting system Samuel used to prophesy the five-year period? Was the Lamanite system identical to one of the Nephite year-counts? Had the 600-year era of Lehi been largely forgotten during the era of the judges? Did the 600-year era of Lehi end more than a couple of months after the end of the 91st year of the judges? Would the unbelievers have waited longer than that to trigger their religious and political purge? These are the sorts of issues with chronological implications that are beyond the scope of this chapter, but will be considered in the chapter on “Proposed Chronology.”

Nephi’s Revelation. As the uproar grew and threats intensified, Nephi responded by calling on the Lord through persistent prayer. Mormon does not state that Nephi waited until just before the “day set apart by the unbelievers” and there is no reason to assume that Nephi hesitated in any way. Mormon’s record does not contain the exact date that the unbelievers chose (but he did record a number of other specific dates; e.g., Alma 16:1; 52:1; 56:1). The chosen date might have been many days in the future. This next segment of the text includes three stanzas that describe Nephi’s diligent response (3 Nephi 1:10-14, structure and italics added):

Now it came to pass that
A_{1A} when *Nephi*,
A_{1B} *the son of Nephi*,
B_{1A} *saw this wickedness*
C_{1A} *of his people*,
D_{1A} *his heart was exceeding sorrowful.*

And it came to pass that
B_{1B} *he went out*
B_{1C} *and bowed himself down upon the earth*,
B_{1D} *and cried mightily to his God*,
C_{1B} *in behalf of his people*;
C_{1C} *yea, those which were about to be destroyed*
D₂ *because of their faith in the tradition of their fathers.*

And it came to pass that
B_{1D} *he cried mightily unto the Lord*,
E_{1A} *all the day*;
B_{2A} *and behold, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying:*
B_{2B} *Lift up your head*
D_{1B} *and be of good cheer:*
E_{2A} *for behold, the time as at hand*,
E_{2B} *and on this night shall the sign be given*,
E_{1B} *and on the morrow*
F_{1A} *come I into the world*,
F_{2A} *to shew unto the world*
G₁ *that I will fulfil all that*
A_{2A} *which I have caused to be spoken*
A_{2B} *by the mouth of my Holy Prophets.*
F_{1B} *Behold, I come unto my own*,
G₂ *to fulfil all things*
F_{2B} *which I have made known*
A_{3A} *unto the children of men*,
A_{3B} *from the foundation of the world*,
G₃ *and to do the will*,
H_{1A} *both of the Father*,
H_{2A} *and of the Son*
H_{1B} *of the Father, because of me*,
H_{2B} *and of the Son, because of my flesh.*
E_{2A} *And behold, the time is at hand*,
E_{2B} *and this night shall the sign be given.*⁵

⁵ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 453. This segment of the 1830 edition apparently was copied from the original manuscript. Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 6; idem, *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part One*, 3-4. The wording of the printer's manuscript is the same as the 1830 edition, except for the words *the* in line E_{1A} and *which* in line A_{2A}. Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part Two*, 778. In line E_{1A}, the printer's manuscript reads "all that day." Based on "the systematic usage found elsewhere in the text," Skousen preferred the printer's manuscript for this text. The word *which* in line A_{2A} does not appear in the printer's manuscript. The omission "appears to be a copy error on the part of Oliver Cowdery." Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five*, 3184-86.

In this segment (3 Nephi 1:10-14), the “A” lines are couplets associated with prophecy: prophets of the Nephite church; the origin and work of prophets; and the audience of prophetic messages. “B” lines refer to Nephi’s actions and the Lord’s response: Nephi saw the wickedness, went out, bowed himself down, cried mightily in prayer, and the voice of the Lord came to him, saying, Lift up your head. The “C” lines refer to the people of concern to Nephi, both the wicked and his followers. “D” lines are about Nephi’s sorrow and the Lord’s injunction to Nephi (and by implication, his people) to be of good cheer.

Unlike the segment dealing with the threatened purge, where chronological terms were placed in the “A” lines (3 Nephi 1:4-9), in this segment, chronological terms appear in the “E” lines: day, time, night and morrow. The “F” lines refer to the actions of the Lord, both past and future: come I into the world/I come unto my own; to shew unto the world/I have made known; and to do the will. The “G” lines are about fulfillment and the “H” lines refer to the beings whose will the Messiah is going to fulfill in the world: the Father and the Son. To conclude, the Lord repeats his temporal revelation: the time is at hand, and this night shall the sign be given.

In the “E” lines of this segment, Mormon expressly noted that Nephi prayed “all the day” (the wording of the 1830 edition) or “all that day” (the wording of the printer’s manuscript). The revelation to Nephi also refers to “this night” (the one immediately “at hand”) and “the morrow” (an indication of the day that would follow). These chronological notes indicate the actual and pending fulfillment of three aspects of the sign of the night without darkness. The proper order of the sun would be maintained; it had risen on the day before the Messiah’s birth and it would set that night and rise on the morrow, the day of his birth.

The Signs Appear. The following segment (3 Nephi 1:15-21) records the appearance of the signs. About five years earlier, Samuel had said, “ye shall know ... of [the sun’s] setting” (14:4) and had prophesied, “in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness;” indeed, “the night shall not be darkened” (Helaman 14:3-4). As the prophecy of Samuel began to be realized, belief was rewarded with knowledge and amazement. Unbelief was replaced with knowledge and fear. The first stanza of this segment (verse 15, structure and italics added) introduces these themes of chronological and redemptive fulfillment:

And it came to pass that
 A_{1A} the *words* which came unto Nephi,
 B_{1A} *was fulfilled,*
 A_{1B} according as they had been *spoken:*
 C_{1A} for behold, at *the going down of the sun,*
 D_{1A} *there was no darkness;*
 E_{1A} *and the people began to be astonished,*
 D_{1B} because there was *no darkness*
 C_{1B} *when the night came.*⁶

⁶ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling of this entire segment (3 Nephi 1:15-21) are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 453-54. This segment of the 1830 edition evidently was copied from the original manuscript. Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 6; idem, *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part One*, 3-4. The wording of the printer’s manuscript for verse 15 is the same as the 1830 edition, except for the words *for behold* in line C_{1A}. Skousen, ed., *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part Two*, 778-79. “Oliver Cowdery frequently wrote *beheld* in place of *behold* in the manuscripts, sometimes without correction; in 3 Nephi 1:15, he apparently made that mistake in [the original manuscript]; when he copied from [the original] into [the printer’s manuscript], Oliver decided to emend the reading by adding the subject pronoun *he*; the 1830 compositor, on the other hand, correctly emended

Here, the “A” lines refer to a prophetic message: spoken words perceived by Nephi, one of the holy prophets. Fulfillment or realization is the theme of the “B” line. The “C” lines describe the physical reality of the sun going down and the prophesied night coming on. The sensible fact that there was no darkness (the “D” lines) is described both before and after the central statement about the effect of this fact on the people: they began to be astonished (the “E” line), as Samuel also had prophesied in his words concerning repentance and redemption (Helaman 14:7-13).

In the following stanza, the passage of time is assumed from the introductory stanza. The sun has set, but there is no darkness in the land. Mormon focuses on the issue of how the people responded to this unique night, particularly detailing the feelings and experiences of the unbelievers (3 Nephi 1:16-18, structure and italics added):

E_{2A} And there were *many which had not believed*
A_{2A} *the words of the prophets,*
C_{2A} *fell to the earth,*
F_{1A} and became as if they were *dead,*
E_{3A} for *they knew* that
F_{1B} the great plan of *destruction*
C_{2B} which they had *laid*
E_{2B} for *those who believed* in
A_{2A} *the word of the prophets,*
B_{1B} had been *frustrated;*
A_{2B} for *the sign which had been given*
B_{2A} was *already at hand;*
E_{3B} and they began to *know*
A₃ that *the Son of God must shortly appear,*
E_{1B} yea, in fine, *all the people*
C_{3A} upon *the face of the whole earth,*
C_{3B} from *the west to the east,*
C_{3C} both *in the land north and in the land south,*
E_{1B} were so *exceedingly astonished,*
C_{2A} that they *fell to the earth;*
E_{3C} for *they knew*
A_{2C} that *the prophets had testified of these things*
B_{2B} for *many years,*
A_{2B} and that *the sign which had been given,*
B_{2A} was *already at hand;*
E_{3D} and they *began to fear*
F₂ because of *their iniquity*
E_{2A} and *their unbelief.*⁷

beheld in [the original manuscript] to *behold* when he set the type.” Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five*, 3186-87.

⁷ The wording of the printer’s manuscript for verses 16 through 18 is the same as the 1830 edition, except for the plural term *words* in the second line A_{2A} and the word *and* before the phrase *in fine* in the first line E_{1B}. Skousen, ed., *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part Two*, 779. According to Skousen, “the 1830 typesetter, it would appear, accidentally replaced *words* with *word*; elsewhere the text has instances of only ‘the words of the prophets.’” The phrases *yea and in fine* and *yea in fine* both appear multiple times in the text. The missing *and* in the first line E_{1B} may be accidental. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five*, 3188-92.

The “A” lines again refer to prophetic words, messages spoken to the people, including the sign which had been given, the Son of God’s imminent appearance and the day that the Lord should be born. The “B” lines contrast the fulfillment in the first stanza with frustration in this second stanza, and the many years of prophetic testimony with the sign being immediately at hand. The “C” lines in this stanza are not about the sun *going down* to create the night. Instead, those who *laid* the plan of destruction *fall* to the earth. Indeed, all the people fall to the earth from astonishment (as Samuel had prophesied; Helaman 14:7), upon the face of the whole earth, in the lands north and south, from the west (where the sun had just been seen to set) to the east. No “D” lines appear in this stanza, but they return in the following stanza. The “E” lines further describe the people: belief, unbelief, growing knowledge, exceeding astonishment and fear. Lastly, the “F” lines refer to the unbelievers: iniquitous in laying a plan of destruction, they fall as if they are dead.

In the last stanza, Mormon returned to the signs themselves (3 Nephi 1:19-21, structure and italics added):

And it came to pass that
D_{1A} there was *no darkness*
C_{1C} in *all that night*,
D_{1C} but it was as *light*
C_{4A} as though it was *mid-day*.
And it came to pass that
C_{1A} *the sun did rise*
C_{4B} in the *morning* again,
D_{1D} according to *its proper order*,
E_{3C} and *they knew*
A_{3B} that it was *the day that the Lord should be born*,
A_{2B} because of *the sign which had been given*.
And it had come to pass
C_{4A} yea, *all things*,
C_{4B} *every whit*,
A_{2A} according to *the words of the prophets*.
And it came to pass also,
C_{4C} that *a new star did appear*,
A_{2D} according to *the word*.⁸

The “A” lines again refer to prophetic messages, the sign that indicates the day that the Lord should be born. No “B” lines appear in this stanza. The “C” lines refer to a night as bright as mid-day and to the sun rising in the morning. All things, including even a new star, appeared as Samuel had prophesied. As in the first stanza, the “D” lines refer to there being no darkness, but light, the reverse of the expected order at night. The proper order then begins again with sunrise in the morning of the next day. The only “E” line in this stanza refers to the knowledge of the people.

This segment (3 Nephi 1:15-21) contains specific statements that further describe the fulfillment of the remaining three of Samuel’s four prophetic elements. The sun went down, but the night was not darkened. Indeed, the night was as light as mid-day. The people were astonished and fell to the earth. Some unbelievers became as if they were dead and, thus, they were

⁸ The wording of the printer’s manuscript for this stanza is the same as the 1830 edition. Skousen, ed., *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part Two*, 779. There are no issues related to textual transmission. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five*, 3192.

unconscious for some or all of the night without darkness. The sun rose and the new day began. The believers knew it was the day of the Messiah's birth.

Sometime in the night without darkness or the following nights, a new star appeared. Although Mormon placed the new star last in the sequence of events, this placement does not necessarily mean the new star was visible only on nights that followed the Messiah's birth. The new star may have been extremely bright and, thus, visible throughout the night that was as light as mid-day. Nonetheless, for a number of nights after the Messiah's birth, a new star likely would have continued to be a visible reminder of the night without darkness.

Finally, one aspect of Mormon's record of prophetic fulfillment may seem puzzling. Samuel had prophesied that "great lights in heaven" would appear (Helaman 14:3) and that "there shall be many signs and wonders in heaven" (Helaman 14:6). In this segment, Mormon does not explicitly mention these separate topics. Instead, he apparently includes them implicitly, by reporting in general that "all things, every whit" (3 Nephi 1:20) had come to pass as prophesied. What were the "many signs and wonders in heaven?" Was the moon full and particularly bright? Were constellations of stars important to the sign? Were there visions and pronouncements from heaven? Mormon specifically mentions the sun and new star and is otherwise silent about signs and wonders in heaven, except to say that "all things, every whit" had come to pass.

Seen and Heard. Additional insight about this silence may be gained from two other reports about the signs and wonders. Right after the segments that detailed the fulfillment of Samuel's prophecy, Mormon recorded the following conflict (3 Nephi 1:22, structure and italics added):

And it came to pass that
A₁ from *this time* forth,
B_{1A} there began to be *lyings*
C₁ sent forth among *the people*,
D₁ by *satan*,
E_{1A} to *harden their hearts*,
E_{2A} to the intent that they *might not believe*
A₂ in those *signs and wonders which they had seen*;
B_{1B} but not withstanding these *lyings*
B_{1C} and *deceivings*,
C₂ the more part of *the people*
E_{2B} did *believe*,
E_{1B} and were *converted*
D₂ unto *the Lord*.⁹

The "A" lines are chronological: "this time" refers back to the night without darkness and the appearance of the new star, and it is linked to the time when "signs and wonders" had been seen

⁹ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 454. The wording of the printer's manuscript is the same as the 1830 edition, except that the initial phrase "And it came to pass" is missing the word *that* and the printer's manuscript has *those* rather than *these* (in line B_{1B} in the structure proposed above). Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part Two*, 779-80. Skousen preferred "the 1830 reading with the occurrence of *that*" because "statistically the text favors the *that* in this context." He also favored the word *these* to *those* because the writing of *those* in the printer's manuscript "appears to have been influenced by the previous 'those signs and wonders' [in line A₂] and facilitated by distraction as Oliver Cowdery copied the text from [the original manuscript] onto a new page in [the printer's manuscript]." Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five*, 3192-95.

by the people. “B” lines describe the false and deceptive words that immediately began to circulate. “C” lines refer to the people. “D” lines link the battle for souls being waged among the people to the ultimate leaders of that battle: the Lord and Satan. “E” lines refer to belief and unbelief, and being converted as opposed to hardening one’s heart.

A majority of the people were converted, however briefly, during the battle of words that closely followed the “signs and wonders which they had seen.” Then, “the people began again to have peace in the land” and the 92nd year of the judges “did pass away, bringing glad tidings unto the people because of the signs which did come to pass, according to the words of the prophecy of all the holy prophets” (3 Nephi 1:22-23, 26). This condition did not last long. In the 93rd year, Gadianton robbers, “who dwelt upon the mountains ... did infest the land,” attacking and slaughtering many. Over the next couple of years, Nephite and Lamanite dissenters (who apparently would not convert) began to join the Gadianton band (3 Nephi 1:27-30). The following segment reports the growing rejection of belief in signs and wonders (3 Nephi 2:1-2, structure and italics added):

And it came to pass that
 A thus passed away *the ninety and fifth year* also,
 B_{1A} and the people *began to forget*
 C_{1A} those *signs and wonders*
 D_{1A} which *they had heard,*
 B_{1B} and *began to be less and less astonished*
 C_{1B} at a *sign or a wonder*
 D_{1B} from *Heaven,*
 B_{1C} insomuch that they *began to be hard in their hearts,*
 B_{1D} and *blind in their minds,*
 B_{1E} and *began to disbelieve*
 C_{1C} all *which they had heard and seen,*
 B_{2A} *imagining up*
 C_{2A} some *vain thing in their hearts,*
 D_{2A} that it was *wrought by men,*
 D_{2B} and *by the power of the Devil,*
 B_{3A} to *lead away*
 B_{3B} and *deceive*
 C_{2B} the *hearts of the people;*
 B_{2B} and *thus did satan get possession*
 C_{2B} of *the hearts of the people again,*
 B_{3B} insomuch that *he did blind their eyes,*
 B_{3A} and *lead them away to believe*
 C_{3A} that *the doctrine of Christ*
 C_{3B} was a *foolish and a vain thing.*¹⁰

The “A” line is the chronological note for this segment. The “B” lines refer to things that were experienced by the people. “C” lines describe the subjects of those experiences and “D”

¹⁰ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling in this segment (3 Nephi 2:1-2) are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 455. The wording of the printer’s manuscript is the same as the 1830 edition. Skousen, ed., *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part Two*, 781. According to Skousen, the “unexpected statement referring to ‘those signs and wonders which they had heard’, in contrast to the phraseology at the end of the verse (‘all which they had heard and seen’)” is similar to Mosiah 28:1 and, thus, is “not impossible.” Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five*, 3203-04.

lines describe the sources of such subjects. In the first stanza, some people begin to forget the signs and wonders they had heard and to be less astonished at a sign or wonder from heaven (“C” and “D” lines). These statements suggest that those whose faith was the weakest began to fall away from the church during the difficult times caused by Gadianton raiding in the land. According to Mormon, the weakest ones appear to be those who had only heard about the night without darkness (line D_{1A}), perhaps because they had fallen out of fear and become as if dead (3 Nephi 1:16), and those whose experience of the strange night and new star came to be understood from later ministering, by which they were converted (3 Nephi 1:22-23). These weakest in the faith began to harden their hearts and disbelieve all that they had heard and seen (“B” lines).

In the second stanza, the hard hearts and blind minds of the disbelievers are presented as fertile soil for vain imaginations (lines B_{2A} and C_{2A}). They justified their rejection of the prophecies and the stories from the astonishing night as being delusions of the believers (line D_{2A}). They seem to have attributed signs in heaven as signs from the devil (line D_{2B}), evil portents of the slaughter that had since taken place in the land. The believers were viewed as using the prophecies and signs to maintain religious and political power (lines B_{2B} and C_{2B}), despite their inability to stop the Gadianton robbers’ murder and plunder.

The third stanza presents the religious and political outcome of this falling away. Satan dominated the hearts of the people again, blinding them to the truth, so that they rejected faith in “the doctrine of Christ” (which apparently included the prophecies and signs) as a foolish and vain belief, a delusion (“B” and “C” lines). The political implications of this rejection (in which, apparently, a majority in the land of Zarahemla again became disbelievers; e.g., 3 Nephi 2:3, 10) would severely undermine the strength of the Nephites in their battles with the Gadianton robbers for nearly the next two decades (3 Nephi 2:11-4:15). In light of such an immediate falling away from faith based on signs and wonders, Mormon’s silence as to the specifics of such things does not appear unreasonable or deceptive.

Chronology of the Messiah’s Birth. The texts referenced above and in part one of this chapter form the Book of Mormon description of the chronology of the Messiah’s birth. The simplest order of events is that set forth in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon (and in the virtually identical wording of the printer’s manuscript) because that sequence of events requires the fewest assumptions. The sequence also must be consistent with the principle of natural uniformity. Events happened in a fixed order, one after the other, no matter what sequence Mormon may have chosen to use when he recorded them. Chart IV at the end of this chapter sets forth the chronology of the Messiah’s birth based on the text of the Book of Mormon.

Rational principles also require that the Book of Mormon chronology of the Messiah’s birth must, if possible, be harmonized and integrated with information kept by other people who lived at the time of his birth. Some of that information (such as memories, year counts and artifacts) has survived. Sources such as the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, secular history and other relevant information also must be examined in terms of rational principles. For a thorough Book of Mormon chronology of the Messiah’s birth, the data in the Book of Mormon must be examined in the light of relevant outside sources. The remaining parts of this chapter will examine such sources.