

The Prophecy of Three Days of Darkness

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In the introduction to this chapter, I associated the sign of the Messiah's death and resurrection with prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite. Even though most of the elements of the sign were known hundreds of years earlier, I think the association with Samuel is fitting and, in this part of the chapter, I will examine that connection. However, the analysis will begin with prophecies of the Messiah's rejection, death and resurrection that were engraved by Nephi in his small plates more than five centuries before Samuel prophesied to the Nephites (1 Nephi 1:19; 10:1-17; 11:32-12:6; 19:7-12; 2 Nephi 25:12-13).

Nephi's Writings. Nephi recorded some of his father's earliest prophecies at Jerusalem (1 Nephi 1:14-19), but with respect to the Messiah's life and mission, Nephi noted only that Lehi "testified that the things which he saw and heard, and also the things which he read in the Book [during his vision; 1 Nephi 1:8-13], manifested plainly of the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world" (1 Nephi 1:19).¹ Nephi also recorded Lehi's subsequent Messianic teachings to his family and followers (1 Nephi 10:1-17), including the 600-year prophecy discussed in the first part of this chapter. Other elements of Lehi's message were that the Messiah would be "a Prophet" raised up by the Lord God "among the Jews," "a Saviour of the world" (vs. 4) or a "Redeemer of the world" (vs. 5). He would be preceded by another prophet who would "prepare the way of the Lord," "baptise in Bethabara, beyond Jordan," "baptise the Messiah with water" and "bear record, that he had baptised the Lamb of God, which should take away the sins of the world" (vss. 7-10). Lehi stated that the Messiah would preach the gospel "among the Jews," but they would dwindle "in unbelief" and slay him "and after that he had been slain, he should rise from the dead, and should make himself manifest, by the Holy Ghost, unto the Gentiles" (vs. 11). Lehi spoke "by the power of the Holy Ghost; which power, he received by faith on the Son of God. And the Son of God was the Messiah, which should come" (vs. 17).²

When Nephi next recorded prophecies about the end of the Messiah's mortal life, they came from his own visions (1 Nephi 11:32-12:6). Nephi "beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people" and "was judged of the world;" and "he was lifted up upon the cross, and slain

¹ 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), 7; 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), 7. The earliest extant text of this verse is found in the printer's manuscript, a copy of the original manuscript prepared for use by the typesetter of the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. There are no material interpretive issues related to the transmission of this text. Royal Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts, Part One* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies ["FARMS"], 2001), 3-4, 55; Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2004), 63-64.

² Capitalization, punctuation and spelling of quotes from 1 Nephi 10:4-17 are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 22-23. The earliest extant text of these verses is found in a portion of the original manuscript that has survived. About 75% of the original manuscript was destroyed by water and mold, between 1841 and 1882, while the manuscript was held in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House, a hotel in Nauvoo, Illinois. There are no material interpretive issues related to the textual transmission of these verses. Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001), 6-7, 96-99; Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One*, 200-7.

for the sins of the world” (vss. 11:32-33). Both “the multitude of the earth” and “the House of Israel” were “gathered together, to fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (vs. 11:35). In “the land of promise,” the place where Lehi and his followers were going when Nephi experienced these visions, Nephi “saw a mist of darkness on the face of the land.” He “saw lightnings, and ... heard thunderings, and earthquakes, and all manner of tumultuous noises; and [he] saw the earth and the rocks, that they rent; and [he] saw mountains tumbling into pieces; and ... the plains of the earth, that they were broken up; and ... many cities, that they were sunk; and ... burned with fire; and ... did tumble to the earth, because of the quaking thereof” (vs. 12:4). When the “vapor of darkness” dissipated, Nephi “saw [the] multitudes which had [not]³ fallen, because of the great and terrible judgments of the Lord” (vs.12:5). Finally, he “saw the Heavens open, and the Lamb of God descending out of Heaven; and he came down and shewed himself unto them [i.e., the multitudes that had survived the chaos]” (vs. 12:6).⁴

Nephi’s connection of the sign of three days of darkness with the upheaval of the earth occurs in 1 Nephi 19:7-12, where he wrote that men would “set [the Messiah] at nought, and hearken not to the voice of his counsels” (vs. 7). In “their iniquity,” they would “scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long suffering towards the children of men” (vs. 9). The Messiah then would “be lifted up according to the words of Zenock, and ... be crucified, according to the words of Neum, and ... be buried in a sepulchre ... according to the words of Zenos, which he spake, concerning the three days of darkness, which should be a sign given of his death, unto them who should inhabit the isles of the sea; more especially given unto them which are of the House of Israel” (vs. 10). Nephi’s reference to three days of darkness is attributed to Zenos, an otherwise unknown prophet included in the brass plates (3 Nephi 10:14-17). According to Nephi, “the Prophet”—continuing the reference to Zenos in verse 10 through to “the Prophet Zenos” in verse 12—also said there would be “thunderings and lightnings of his power, by tempest, by fire, and by smoke, and vapour of darkness;” rocks would rend, the earth would open and groan, and mountains would “be carried up” (vss. 11-12).⁵ Thus, Nephi joined his own visions of earthly catastrophe (1 Nephi 12:4-6) with those of Zenos, including the three-day length of the upheaval.

Finally, in Nephi’s compilation of prophecies near the end of his writing in the small plates (2 Nephi 25-30), he returned to the topic of the Messiah’s rejection, death and resurrection (2 Nephi 25:12-13, proposed conceptual structure and italics added):

A₁ and when the *day* cometh
 B_{1A} that *the only begotten of the Father*,
 B_{1B} yea, even *the Father of heaven and of earth*,

³ In copying the printer’s manuscript from the original manuscript, Oliver Cowdery dropped the words *the* and *not* from this passage and the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon reproduced those mistakes. The word *not* was restored in the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One*, 248-49.

⁴ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling of quotes from 1 Nephi 11:32-12:6 are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 26-27. Except as set forth in footnote 3, there are no material interpretive issues related to the textual transmission of these verses. Skousen, *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 106-9; idem, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One*, 237-51.

⁵ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling of quotes from 1 Nephi 19:7-12 are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 51. There are no material interpretive issues related to the textual transmission of these verses. Skousen, *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 150-52; idem, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One*, 403-11. Regarding 1 Nephi 19:7-10, see also part one of this chapter, “Lehi’s 600-year Prophecy,” 3-5, 9-10.

C₁ shall manifest himself unto them *in the flesh*,
 D₁ behold, they will *reject* him,
 E_{1A} because of their *iniquities*,
 E_{1B} and the *hardness* of their hearts,
 E_{1C} and the *stiffness* of their necks.
 D₂ Behold they will *crucify* him,
 C₂ and after that he is *laid in a Sepulcher*
 A₂ for the space of *three days*,
 C₃ he shall *rise from the dead*,
 E₂ with *healing in his wings*,
 B₂ and all they that shall believe on *his name*,
 B₃ shall be saved in the Kingdom of God⁶

The “A” lines refer to the prophesied days of death and darkness. The “B” lines refer to some of the Messiah’s names. Events related to his body appear in the “C” lines: birth, burial and resurrection. The “D” lines describe the reaction of those at Jerusalem (2 Nephi 25:11); he will be rejected and crucified. The reasons for this reaction are listed in lines E_{1A} through E_{1C}: iniquity, hard hearts and stiff necks. However, line E₂ answers these human defects with his power to heal.

Complementing this prophecy, Nephi turned to the fate of his own people and taught that “after that the Messiah shall come, there shall be signs given unto my people ... of his death and resurrection; and great and terrible shall that day be unto the wicked; for they shall perish; and they perish because they cast out the prophets, and the saints, and stone them, and slay them” (2 Nephi 26:3).⁷ In the land of the Nephites, the iniquitous themselves would perish at the time of the Messiah’s death.

Thus, these early prophecies concerning the death and resurrection of the Messiah provided the Nephites with expectations regarding the end of his mission among the Jews. Because of the iniquity and unbelief of men, the Redeemer will be rejected, scorned, judged of the world, scourged, smitten, spit on, lifted up on a cross and slain for the sins of the world. His body will be buried in a sepulcher for three days. During that time, in the Nephite land of promise, the sign of his death will be three days of darkness and chaos. The earth will quake and split open, plains will be broken up, and mountains will tumble into pieces or be carried up. There will be fires, smoke, tempests, lightning, thundering and other tumultuous noises. Cities will sink, tumble to earth and be burned. Mists and vapors of darkness will cover the land. The wicked will perish. After three days, the Messiah will rise from the dead. By the power of the Holy Ghost, he will manifest himself to the Gentiles. At some point, the heavens will open and the Lamb of God will descend and appear to the multitudes that survived the chaos.

Since the three-day prophecy appears in Nephi’s compilation of prophecies (like Lehi’s 600-year prophecy), it probably was closely associated with the “doctrine of Christ” taught by Nephi,

⁶ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 104. There are no material interpretive issues related to the textual transmission of these verses. Skousen, *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part One*, 212; Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Two* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2005), 814-17.

⁷ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 106. There are no material interpretive issues related to the textual transmission of this verse. Skousen, *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part One*, 216; idem, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Two*, 828.

Jacob and other Nephite prophets.⁸ Given the importance of that doctrine to the believers, I cannot speculate that Lehi's 600-year prophecy of the Messiah's coming was measured for nearly six centuries, but the three-day prophecy was ignored or forgotten by the Nephite prophets. According to Nephi, the Hebrew prophet Zenos initiated the three-day prophecy (1 Nephi 19:10-24) and the words of Zenos on other topics were used by later Nephite prophets (Jacob 5:1-6:1; Alma 33:3, 13, 15; 34:7; Helaman 8:19) and by the Lamanite prophet Samuel (Helaman 15:11). Hence, it must be assumed that the believers were aware of the three-day prophecy as stated by Zenos and expounded by Nephi.

Samuel's Prophecy. Nonetheless, after Nephi, the next record of the three-day prophecy in the Book of Mormon is when Samuel confronted the Nephites from their city wall (Helaman 14:14-27). He began this part of his exhortation by stating or, more accurately, the Nephite scribe who recorded Samuel's mission began this part by writing, "And behold, again another sign I give unto you; yea, a sign of his death" (vs. 14). In the following five verses, Samuel was recorded as setting forth doctrines associated with sin and repentance, death and resurrection. Then Samuel was said to have referred to the three-day prophecy (Helaman 14:20-27, proposed conceptual structure and italics added):

A₁ But behold, as I *said unto you*
 B₁ concerning *another sign*,
 B₂ a *sign* of his death:
 C_{1A} behold, in *that day* that he shall suffer death,
 D_{1A} *the sun* shall be darkened
 E₁ and *refuse to give his light* unto you;
 D_{1B} and also *the moon, and the stars*;
 E₂ and there *shall be no light*
 F₁ upon *the face of this land*,
 C_{1B} even from *the time* that he shall suffer death,
 G₁ for *the space of three days*,
 C₂ to *the time* that he shall rise again from the dead;
 C_{1C} yea, at *the time* that he shall yield up the ghost,
 D_{2A} there shall be *thunderings and lightning*s
 G₂ for *the space of many hours*,
 D_{3A} and the earth shall *shake and tremble*,
 F_{2A} and the rocks which is upon *the face of this earth*,
 F_{3A} which is both *above the earth and beneath*,
 H_{1A} which ye know at this time is *solid*,
 H_{1B} or the more part of it is one *solid* mass,
 D_{3B} shall be *broken up*;
 D_{3C} yea, they shall be *rent in twain*,
 C₃ and shall *ever after*
 D_{3C} be found *in seams, and in cracks*,
 D_{3B} and *in broken fragments*
 F_{2B} upon *the face of the whole earth*;
 F_{3B} yea, both *above the earth and both beneath*.
 D_{2B} And behold there shall be *great tempests*,
 F_{4A} and there shall be *many mountains* laid low,
 F_{5A} like unto a *valley*,
 F_{5B} and there shall be many places, which are now called *valleys*,

⁸ See part one of this chapter, "Lehi's 600-year Prophecy," 9-11.

F_{4B} which shall become *mountains*, whose height thereof is great.
 D_{3D} And many highways shall be *broken up*,
 I_{1A} and many cities shall become *desolate*,
 D_{3E} and many graves shall be *opened*,
 I_{1B} and shall yield up many of their *dead*;
 I₂ and many *saints* shall appear unto many.
 A_{2A} And behold thus hath the angel *spoken unto me*;
 A_{2B} for he *said unto me*,
 D_{2A} That there should be *thunderings and lightnings*
 G₂ for *the space of many hours*;
 A_{2C} and he *said unto me*
 D_{2C} that while *the thunder and the lightning* lasted,
 D_{2D} and *the tempest*,
 B₃ that *these things* should be,
 E₃ and that *darkness* should cover
 F_{2C} *the face of the whole earth*,
 G₁ for *the space of three days*.⁹

This record of Samuel's prophecy is complex. The "A" lines make it clear that the sayings were given by Samuel, as directed by the angel who spoke to him. The events are described by the Nephite author as a single sign (lines B₁ and B₂); however, it was clearly understood that the sign of the Messiah's death would include many different events ("these things" in line B₃). The "C" lines appear to be focused on the times of the Messiah's death, resurrection and "ever after" (implying the vast change to result from his atonement and resurrection). Lines D_{1A} and D_{1B} refer to the sun, moon and stars. Lines D_{2A} through D_{2D} focus on thunderings, lightnings and tempests in the air above the earth. Lines D_{3A} through D_{3E} present the effects of the earth's shaking: rocks broken up and rent in twain; and later found with seams and cracks, or broken into fragments. Highways would be broken up and graves would be opened. The "E" lines emphasize that not only would astronomical lights be darkened, but there would be no light in the land. Line F₁ refers to "the face of this land," the F₂ lines mention "the face of this earth" or "of the whole earth," and the F₃ through F₅ lines make it clear that the "whole earth" included the earth above the face (mountains) and below the face (valleys). The "G" lines refer to periods of many hours and three days. The "H" lines describe the solidity of the rocks before the great catastrophe, apparently to create a contrast with their broken status later. The "H" lines also create a contrast with the "I" lines, which themselves contrast the desolation of the wicked cities (where the wicked apparently become as dead as solid rocks) and the opened graves which yield up their righteous dead, who then appear to many of the survivors of the calamities.

⁹ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling of quotes from Helaman 14:14-27 are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 446-47. For this part of the 1830 edition, the typesetter apparently worked directly from the original manuscript rather than from the printer's manuscript. Skousen, *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part One*, 3-4; idem, *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 6. 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), 3118-34. The wording of the printer's manuscript is the same as the 1830 edition, except for the phrase *the day* instead of *that day* in line C_{1A} and the phrase *the land* instead of *this land* in line F₁. Since both the printer's manuscript and 1830 edition appear to have been copies of the original manuscript of this passage, there are these two discrepancies in the extant copies. 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), 768-70. Skousen analyzed these discrepancies and concluded that "transmission errors show that Oliver Cowdery was prone" to make these kinds of errors when preparing the printer's manuscript. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five*, 3120-27.

Samuel certainly believed that the non-believing Nephites needed to hear or be reminded of the three-day prophecy. A comparison of his description of the elements of the sign (as recorded by the Nephite scribe) with the elements recorded by Nephi in the small plates clearly shows that Samuel restated the majority of the elements that had been known, at least among the believers, for more than five centuries before he climbed onto the Nephite wall and began to speak.

Elements of the Signs of the Messiah's Death and Resurrection	Nephi	Samuel
The Messiah is slain or crucified	1 Nephi 10:11;19:10	Helaman 14:14, 20
Mists of darkness on the land for 3 days	1 Nephi 12:4; 19:10-11	Helaman 14:20, 27
Sun, moon and stars darkened		Helaman 14:20
Lightnings, thunderings, tempests and whirlwinds	1 Nephi 12:4; 19:11; 2 Nephi 26:5-6	Helaman 14:21, 23, 26-27
Earthquakes	1 Nephi 12:4	Helaman 14:21
Earth, plains and rocks rend and broken up	1 Nephi 12:4; 19:11-12	Helaman 14:21-22
Earth opens and swallows	1 Nephi 19:11; 2 Nephi 26:5	
Mountains tumble into pieces or are carried up	1 Nephi 12:4; 19:11; 2 Nephi 26:5	Helaman 14:23
Cities sunk, burned, tumbled and made desolate	1 Nephi 12:4	Helaman 14:24
Highways broken up		Helaman 14:24
Tumultuous noises; earth groans	1 Nephi 12:4; 19:12	
Fire and smoke	1 Nephi 19:11	
Wicked perish, but multitudes do not fall	1 Nephi 12:5; 2 Nephi 26:3-8	
After 3 days, the Messiah rises from the dead	1 Nephi 10:11; 2 Nephi 25:13	Helaman 14:20
Graves open; saints arise and appear to many		Helaman 14:25
Heaven opens; the Lamb of God appears	1 Nephi 12:6; 2 Nephi 26:9	Helaman 14:28

Samuel did provide at least one completely new element of the sign: "many graves shall be opened, and shall yield up many of their dead; and many saints shall appear unto many. And behold thus hath the angel spoken unto me" (Helaman 14:25-26). The fulfillment of this element of the prophecy, which an angel commanded Samuel to deliver, became a subject of discussion when the resurrected Redeemer appeared to the surviving multitudes many years later (Helaman 13:7; 14:9, 26; 3 Nephi 23:8-13). In addition, I suggest that it was Samuel who delivered a second new element to the Nephites' understanding of the three-day sign. They could expect it to occur when 33 years had passed away following the signs of the Messiah's birth.

Samuel's 33-Year Prophecy. Nowhere in the Nephite record of Samuel's mission (Helaman 13:1-16:9) does the 33-year prophecy appear. Indeed, nowhere in the rest of the Book of Mormon is the 33-year prophecy mentioned explicitly. Nevertheless, my suggestion that Samuel delivered that prophecy to the Nephites is not speculation. The principal text on which my suggestion relies is 3 Nephi 8:1-4. The conceptual structure and key terms of those verses may be organized as follows:

And now it came to pass that
A₁ according to *our record*,
B and *we know* our record to be true:
C₁ for behold, *it was a just man*
A₂ which did keep *the record*;
D₁ for he truly did *many miracles in the name of Jesus*;
C₂ and *there was not any man*
D₂ which could do *a miracle in the name of Jesus*,
E₁ save he were *cleansed every whit* from his iniquity.
And now it came to pass,
E₂ if there was *no mistake made* by this man
A₃ in the reckoning of *our time*,

A₄ *the thirty and third year had passed away,*
 C₃ *and the people began to look with great earnestness*
 D₃ *for the sign which had been given by the prophet Samuel, the Lamanite;*
 A₅ *yea, for the time that there should be darkness*
 A₆ *for the space of three days, over the face of the land.*
 C₄ *And there began to be great doubtings and disputations among the people,*
 D₄ *notwithstanding so many signs had been given.*¹⁰

The “A” lines focus on the historical record, which included prophecy and the reckoning of the passage of time. In that record, 33 years had passed away and the believers then fully expected the time had come for the three-day prophecy to be fulfilled. The “B” line deals with knowledge, a theme taken up in the following segment of text (3 Nephi 8:5-18). The “C” lines distinguish between believers and non-believers. A specific believer (C₁) is mentioned, followed by the implication that any man could become a just man (C₂). The believers took their expectation about the timing of the sign seriously (C₃), while non-believers doubted and disputed such beliefs (C₄). Miracles associated with the life and power of the Messiah (lines D₁ and D₂) are linked to the miracle of true prophecy (D₃) and all the prophesied signs that had already occurred (D₄). Finally, line E₁ defines a just man as one who has been cleansed every whit from iniquity—by implication, through belief in, and adherence to, the principles and ordinances of the “doctrine of Christ” (e.g., 2 Nephi 31:2-21)—which would preclude dishonesty or fraud in the calendar count. Hence, if the record keeper made no inadvertent mistake, the record was accurate (E₂). In effect, the “E” lines address the themes of honesty, faith and humility that are implicit in the other lines.

This passage makes it clear that after a period of 33 years had passed following the signs of the Messiah’s birth (which had been prophesied by Samuel about 38 years earlier), the believers began to look for the three-day sign of his death and resurrection. *Only* at that time did the people begin “to look with great earnestness for the sign” (3 Nephi 8:2-3). Their sure expectation was that 33 years would end and then the sign would be given. This indisputable expectation is text-based, circumstantial evidence of the existence of a 33-year prophecy regarding the anticipated lifespan of the Messiah.

When did the 33 years begin? The record states that the years had been measured from “the time which the sign was given” and/or from “this period which the sign was given, or from the coming of Christ” (3 Nephi 2:7-8).¹¹ Did the longevity of the new star figure into the definition of the

¹⁰ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 470. To print these verses in 1830, the typesetter apparently worked directly from the original manuscript rather than the printer’s manuscript. The wording of the printer’s manuscript is the same as the 1830 edition, indicating that the original manuscript was identical to these two copies. There are no material interpretive issues related to the textual transmission of these verses. Skousen, *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part One*, 3-4; idem, *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part Two*, 802-3; idem, *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 6; idem, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five*, 3307.

¹¹ “[I]n standard English, we expect *when* as the relative pronoun when the referent involves time.... [T]he original text of the Book of Mormon sometimes used *which* (possibly as a Hebraism) in place of the expected *when*.” Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five*, 3205 (italics in the original). Capitalization, punctuation and spelling of these verses are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 455. This text also appears to have been typeset directly from the original manuscript rather than the printer’s manuscript. The wording of the printer’s manuscript is the same as the 1830 edition, indicating that the original manuscript was identical to these two copies. There are no material interpretive issues related to the textual transmission of these verses. Skousen, *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part Two*, 782; idem, *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 6.

“period which the sign was given”? Were 33 years measured from the beginning or end of that period? Or were the 33 years measured from the night when “the sign was given” or from “the coming of Christ,” i.e., the day that followed the night without darkness (3 Nephi 1:10-13)? Were there multiple (even competing) calendars measuring time from the night without darkness, the next day and the appearance and/or disappearance of the new star? The record about the change in time keeping by the believers clearly admits some element of vagueness. This potential topic for disagreement reminds me of the disputes that occurred with respect to the timing of Samuel’s five-year prophecy of the signs of the Messiah’s birth and the disputes that shortly followed such signs, concerning the reality (and if real, the calendric and religious implications) of those signs (3 Nephi 1:4-9; 2:1-8).¹² The implication for interpreting 3 Nephi 8:1-4 is that some disputes might focus on the very beginning of the 33-year period—and its association with Samuel’s delivery of the prophesied signs five years earlier.

How were the 33 years measured? The text of 3 Nephi 8:1-4 implies that some disputes may have involved whether the prophesied 33-year period had, in fact, been accurately measured. The unnamed calendar keeper (a believer whose veracity was emphasized) held that 33 years had just passed away. However, the measurement of the 33-year period seems to have begun (and continued for a period of more than nine years after the Messiah’s birth) with time recorded in the ancient Nephite calendar, in the calendar of the reign of the judges and, perhaps, in one or more new calendars measured from “the time which the sign was given” and/or the “period which the sign was given, or from the coming of Christ” (3 Nephi 1:1; 2:1-8). Did all of these time keeping systems use the same year length? If there were multiple year lengths, did they all agree (reckoning back nine years) as to the time of the Messiah’s birth?

Perhaps the non-believers had their own calendar keepers who could dispute that 33 years had passed away or who could argue that the believers’ calendar keeper had used the wrong calendar and the 33-year period had long since passed away. For example, if the non-believers measured the year with an observational 12-moon calendar (about 354.367 days) and the believers used an observational solar calendar (about 365.2422 days), then the end of the 34th year of the non-believers (about 12048 days) had already passed away when the end of the 33rd year of the believers (about 12053 days) occurred and they began to watch with great earnestness for the sign. Thus, there may have been numerous calendric issues fueling the disputes.

Other issues are implicit in 3 Nephi 8:1-4. For example, about 38 years earlier, Samuel pointedly raised the issue of pride (Helaman 13:21-39). He railed against the wealth and wickedness of the people. “Behold ye, the people of this great city, and ... hearken unto the words which the Lord saith; ... ye are cursed because of your riches, and also are your riches cursed because ye have set your hearts upon them” (vs. 21). A wicked Nephite’s “heart [was] not drawn out unto the Lord, but ... [did] swell with great pride, unto boasting, and unto great swelling, envyings, strifes, malice, persecutions, and murders, and all manner of iniquities” (vs. 22). Referring to the treatment given to prophets (like himself) by the non-believers, he noted that they “cast out the prophets, and [did] mock them, and cast stones at them, and [did] slay them, and ... [did] all manner of iniquity unto them” (vs. 24). “O ye wicked and ye perverse generation,” Samuel questioned from the wall of their city (vs. 29), “ye hardened and ye stiffnecked people, how long will ye suppose that the Lord will suffer you?”¹³

¹² See also part two of this chapter, “The Five-year Prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite,” 4-7.

¹³ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling of quotes from Helaman 13:21-39 are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 443-45. Again, the typesetter for this text appears to have worked directly from the original manuscript. The wording of the printer’s manuscript is the same as the 1830 edition, indicating that the original manuscript was identical to these two copies. There are no material interpretive issues related to

One answer to that religious and chronological question had been given by their ancestor Nephi, whose “doctrine of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:2-21) the non-believers rejected. Nephi prophesied that “the wicked ... shall perish” (2 Nephi 26:3) at the time of the three-day sign. So, when would that sign appear? The expectation of the believers, throughout “great doubtings and disputations” (3 Nephi 8:2-4), implies a second answer to Samuel’s question. Apparently, during Samuel’s “many days” of preaching before he was cast out (Helaman 13:2), at least the believers were told that 33 years would pass away after the Messiah’s birth and then they would suffer through the three days of chaos and darkness.

Another issue related to the dispute between believers and non-believers was Samuel’s Lamanite origin. According to Samuel, “the Lord [hath] commanded me, by his angel, that I should come and tell this thing unto you; ... yea, he hath said unto me, Cry unto this people, repent and prepare the way of the Lord. And now *because I am a Lamanite*, and hath spoken unto you the words which the Lord commanded me, and because it was hard against you, ye are angry with me, and do seek to destroy me, and have cast me out from among you” (Helaman 14:9-10, italics added).¹⁴ Nowhere in the Nephite record does the name Samuel (when referring to this prophet) occur without the phrase “the Lamanite” or “a Lamanite” appearing in conjunction with his name (Headings, Helaman 7 and 13; Helaman 13:2, 5; 14:1; 16:1; 3 Nephi 1:5; 8:3; 23:9; Mormon 1:19), unless his name is being repeated after the initial use of such a phrase in conjunction with his name (Helaman 16:1-2, 5-6; 3 Nephi 1:5-6, 9; 23:9-10; Mormon 1:19; 2:10). Following hundreds of years of enmity and war (e.g., 2 Nephi 4:12-13; 5:1-25, 34; Jacob 1:9-14; Enos 1:20-24; Jarom 1:6-7; Omni 1:2, 10, 24; Words of Mormon 1:12-14), Nephites and Lamanites were deeply divided. For the elite and non-believing Nephites, Samuel was hated as a believer and a Lamanite.

The use of names by the writer of the “D” lines in 3 Nephi 8:1-4 also is instructive. He did not coincidentally associate just two names with the miracles and signs. First, he used the name of Jesus—a name that also had been revealed to Nephite prophets hundreds of years earlier (e.g., 2 Nephi 10:3; 25:19-20; Jacob 4:6)—and second, he used the name of Samuel the Lamanite. Honored names like Zenos and Nephi were not mentioned, despite the fact that their prophecies included the earliest references to the sign of three days of chaos and darkness (1 Nephi 11:32-12:6; 19:7-12; 2 Nephi 25:12-13). At the end of the 33-year period, the prophet Samuel was singularly associated with the expectation of the three-day sign. This unique association implies that the 33-year period was prophesied by Samuel in connection with his inspired reiteration and modification of the three-day prophecy.

Thus, based on four textual grounds, I suggest it is reasonable to infer that Samuel delivered a 33-year prophecy to the Nephites. First, the timing of the believers’ searching “with great earnestness for the sign” indicates that a 33-year prophecy existed. Second, Samuel’s recorded warning about the three-day sign and his religious and chronological question 38 years earlier are evidence that the timing of the three days of darkness was considered at the time of his mission. Third, the “great doubtings and disputations” pitted believers and non-believers against

the textual transmission of these verses. Skousen, *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part Two*, 764-67; idem, *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 6; idem, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five*, 3092-3110.

¹⁴ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 445. The typesetter for this text seems to have worked directly from the original manuscript. The wording of the printer’s manuscript is the same as the 1830 edition, indicating that the original manuscript was identical to these two copies. There are no material interpretive issues related to the textual transmission of these verses. Skousen, *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part Two*, 768; idem, *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 6; idem, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five*, 3115-16.

each other when the 33rd year ended, much like it did when the Samuel's prophesied fifth year had ended. In each instance, the cultural clash involved issues about the fulfillment of prophecy, the existence and timing of signs, and a hated Lamanite versus elite and wicked Nephites. Finally, the Nephite writer did not associate the names of Zenos or Nephi with the fulfillment of the three-day prophecy. Only the names of Jesus and Samuel were linked with the miracles and signs.

A 38-year Prophecy. Since Samuel prophesied five years before the signs of the Messiah's birth were expected, I also think it is reasonable and fitting to refer to the three-day prophecy (with the additional elements apparently added by Samuel) as his 38-year prophecy. I mention this chronological element because a 38-year period may have had Lamanite or Nephite astronomical associations connected with the great lights of heaven. Thirty-eight observational solar years are the equivalent of about 13,879.2 days, while 470 synodic cycles and 508 sidereal cycles of the moon require about 13,879.4 days each.¹⁵ Thus, a 38-year prophecy might have provided a long, but relatively precise period in which these great lights could be seen to have returned to the positions they held in the heavens at about the time when Samuel delivered his prophecies. Would the normal courses of these great lights of heaven be altered? Would they shine brightly or be concealed by thick mists of darkness?

Other Issues. Similar to the prophecies considered in parts one and two of this chapter and as noted above, the 33-year prophecy also suggests a few more temporal issues. First, what was the length of Samuel's year? Was it the same as a Nephite year? Second, the expectation of the people after 33 of their years had passed away indicates that a full or complete period of Nephite years was understood, but were the Lamanite's 38 years expected to fully pass away? Finally, a perhaps minor chronological issue is linked to the three-day prophecy. How would the passage of time be measured when the days were dark? For the signs of the Messiah's birth, the great lights of heaven would be readily seen. However, with three days of darkness, how would the people determine that one night had come and then passed, let alone three days and two (or perhaps three) related nights? These questions will be considered in subsequent chapters of this source book dealing with calendric issues and the Messiah's birth, death and resurrection.

¹⁵ The sun's tropical year is about 365.2422 days. See, e.g., Donald H. Menzel and Jay M. Pasachoff, *A Field Guide to the Stars and Planets*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), 416. The moon's synodic cycle (its cycle of phases) lasts about 29.5306 days. See, e.g., <http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/phase/phasecat.html>. The moon's sidereal cycle (its cycle with respect to the stars) lasts about 27.3217 days. See, e.g., www-istp.gsfc.nasa.gov/stargaze/Smoon.htm.