

When Was the Messiah Crucified and Resurrected?
An Introduction

Randall P. Spackman

The single, most crucial text for placing the chronology of the Book of Mormon in an historical context appears in 3 Nephi 8:5. This verse begins with a chronological fact and then leads into Mormon's report about the fulfillment of the prophecy of three days of darkness (the beginning of which marked the death of the Messiah).¹ However, 3 Nephi 8:5 itself is introduced by a four verse segment (3 Nephi 8:1-4) that I presented in the chapter on "Chronological Structure"² 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.³

In my earlier reference to this segment, I noted that the "A" lines center on the historical record, which included a reckoning of the passage of time. In that record, 33 years had passed

¹ See part three, "The Prophecy of Three Days of Darkness," in the chapter on "Chronological Structure."

² *Ibid.*, 6.

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), 470; 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), 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. 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; *idem*, *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts, Part Two* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001), 802-3; Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2008), 3307.

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. The “C” lines differentiate between believers and non-believers. A specific believer, a just man (C₁), is mentioned, followed by the inference that any man could become a just man (C₂). The believers’ held an earnest expectation about the timing of the sign (C₃), but the non-believers doubted and disputed the belief (C₄). Miracles experienced by the believers in connection with the life and power of the Messiah (lines D₁ and D₂) are associated with the miracle of true prophecy delivered by Samuel, the Lamanite (D₃) and the many prophesied signs that had already occurred (D₄). 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). Such principles would preclude dishonesty or fraud in the year-count. While noting the possibility of a mistake (E₂), Mormon testified “we know our record to be true” (B).

Who Reckoned the Year-count? Although the just man who kept the record is not named in this segment, there can be no doubt that the record keeper was Nephi. He was a principal figure in Mormon’s historical report of the years that preceded the end of the 33rd year. In the 29th year from the coming of Christ, persecutions based on wealth commenced in the land and contention spread rapidly, “insomuch that the church began to be broken up” (3 Nephi 6:10-14). Immense political and social upheavals occurred in the 30th year. The “church was broken up in all the land save it were among a few of the Lamanites who were converted unto the true faith” (3 Nephi 6:14).

Some members of the church who had testified to the non-believers were captured and put to death secretly by certain of the judges. The new chief judge sought to bring the murderers to justice. However, a secret combination (consisting largely of high priests, lawyers and judges) sought to establish a kingship. The chief judge was murdered and the system of judges was destroyed by the conspiracy. To protect themselves, the people separated into tribes of kinsmen and their supporters. The tribes then united to oppose the presumptive king and his supporters, who fled for their lives “into the northernmost part of the land” (3 Nephi 6:15-7:13).

There were “but few righteous men” among the Nephite tribal leaders and their kinsmen and supporters (3 Nephi 7:7). Nonetheless, Nephi continued to minister among the Nephites with such power and authority, and to perform so many miracles, that the non-believers became angry with him (3 Nephi 7:14-21). Although the results of his ministry in the 31st year were meager, Nephi persevered throughout the 32nd and 33rd years with the help of other ministers of the holy order. Many Nephites eventually repented and accepted baptism (3 Nephi 7:22-26).

Nephi had held the official record keeping responsibility and had led the church since the 91st year of the judges (3 Nephi preface, 1-3). He knew when the signs of the Messiah’s birth were given (3 Nephi 1:10-21). He survived the breakup of the church among the Nephites, the murderous conspiracy that destroyed the rule of the judges, and the threats against him and his initially few followers who remained faithful among the Nephites (e.g., 3 Nephi 7:13, 17-20). All through this period of intense missionary work, Nephi was the official record keeper. He was “a just man who did keep the record,” a man who “did many miracles in the name of Jesus,” a man who, like other just men, had been “cleansed every whit from his iniquity” (3 Nephi 8:1). In light of the resurrected Christ’s review and minor correction of Nephi’s record prior to the end of the 34th year (3 Nephi 10:18; 23:7-13; 4 Nephi 1:1), Mormon certainly was justified in stating that “we know our record to be true” (3 Nephi 8:1).

If There Was No Mistake. Mormon’s mention of the possibility of a mistake in the measurement of time may seem confusing, out of place or unnecessary. However, when understood in its context, Mormon’s reference to this possibility is none of those things. First, the important “E” lines in the segment (3 Nephi 8:1-4) acknowledge the logical possibility that Nephi

still could make mistakes. In the chapter on "Chronological Structure," I noted that Nephi, as a man cleansed from iniquity, would not have engaged in any form of unfaithfulness in keeping the year-count. Hence, if he made no inadvertent error in reckoning the time, his record was accurate and a total of 33 years had passed away (3 Nephi 8:1-2).⁴

Second, despite the breakup of the church among the Nephites, the destruction of their government and the separation of the people into tribes (3 Nephi 6:14; 7:1-7), all who remained faithful to the doctrine of Christ and the prophecy of Samuel regarding the sign of three days of darkness would have been looking forward to the end of the 33rd year (3 Nephi 8:2-4). There were members of the holy order other than Nephi (e.g., 3 Nephi 1:23; 7:14-26) who may have maintained unofficial year-counts in their separate tribes. Prophets and priests among the Lamanites, where the church was not broken up (3 Nephi 6:14), may have maintained their independent year-counts. With unofficial record keepers and some isolation associated with the breakup of the church and formation of tribal groups, it may be reasonable to assume that differences in the measurement of time could have resulted (whether through mistake on the part of believers or intention on the part of non-believers). Mormon's record, however, relied on Nephi's official year-count, a count that Mormon knew to be true (3 Nephi 8:1), while at the same time he acknowledged the human weakness for making mistakes.

A third line of interpretation that may explain Mormon's mentioning the possibility of a mistake also has textual support. When the people in the land of Zarahemla are said to have measured years "from the time when the sign was given ... that Christ should come into the world" (3 Nephi 2:7) and to have reckoned their time "from this period when the sign was given, or from the coming of Christ" (3 Nephi 2:8), I cannot fail to note that the second formulation seems to include alternatives. Were the alternatives merely parallel,⁵ but functionally identical formulations?

The "time when the sign was given" or the "period when the sign was given" seems to have begun at nightfall when darkness did not occur (3 Nephi 1:15-19). Hence, one possible formulation of the new year-count associated with the Messiah's life may have been a year-count that began with the night when the prophesied sign commenced. The night without darkness appears to have been considered the leading sign that Samuel's prophecies were true (3 Nephi 1:4-8). For some, who may have reckoned the new year-count from the evening when the sign commenced, each subsequent day may have begun with the setting of the sun.

Others may have believed that Samuel's prophetic formulation of the sign consisted of two days (periods from the rising to the setting of the sun) with an intervening night without darkness (Helaman 14:3-4). The believers looked forward "steadfastly for that day and that night and that day which should be as one day as if there were no night" (3 Nephi 1:8). Thus, a second possible inauguration time for the new year-count may have been reckoned from the rising of the sun on the morning before the night without darkness.

The phrase "the coming of Christ" undoubtedly refers to the Messiah's birth into the world during the day or daylight period that followed the night without darkness (3 Nephi 1:12-14). For those who may have measured the day from evening to evening, the daylight period would have been the same as for a third possible group who may have measured the day from the rising of the sun after the night without darkness. However, for those who may have begun the new count of

⁴ See part three, "The Prophecy of Three Days of Darkness," 6-9.

⁵ See my suggested parallel structure for these verses in part one, "The Fulfillment of Lehi's Prophecy," 6-7, in the chapter on "Jesus' Birth."

years from the rising of the sun on the morning before the night without darkness, “the coming of Christ” would have occurred on day two of the new year-count, rather than day one.

Among those who may have measured the new year-count “from the coming of Christ” or the day of his birth, the prior day and its night without darkness may have been recognized as the end of Lehi’s era of 600 years of prophetic anticipation. That is, there may have been two celebrated days each year: the day when the sign began, with its astonishing night without darkness (as the last day of each calendar year), followed by day one of the following calendar year “from the coming of Christ.”

Finally, in the chapter on “Calendars,” I based my discussion of the calendar used to measure the “Nephite Christian Era” or “NCE” on the assumption that the sign of the night without darkness definitively ended and the first day of the Nephite Christian Era conclusively began at sunrise on day one of the first year “from the coming of Christ.” That is, a single day memorialized both the end of the sign and the day of the Messiah’s birth. I will return to this question concerning possible alternative formulations of the new year-count in the chapter on “Proposed Chronology.” In this present chapter, I mention these alternative interpretations of the wording in 3 Nephi 2:7-8 because Mormon may have been aware (within the context of the political, religious and tribal upheaval that occurred) of other counts that measured years “from the time when the sign was given;” that is, one night longer or, perhaps, one full day longer than what seems to have been Nephi’s official count “from the coming of Christ.” Such alternative counts may have led to the question of a mistake.

In each of the potential formulations, the new star may have appeared during the night without darkness. However, if the brightness of the night without darkness did not permit the new star to be seen, then the sign of the new star may not have been visible until the night following the Messiah’s birth. Of course, the new star likely would have been seen on many subsequent nights in fulfillment of Nephi’s prophecy (2 Nephi 26:3).

What was “Our Time”? A thorough reader will note that Mormon did not write that 33 years had passed away “from the coming of Christ.” According to 3 Nephi 8:2, the 33rd year “in the reckoning of our time” had passed away. Although this is the only instance in the Book of Mormon where the phrase “our time” refers to a calendric subject, the measurement of time by the believing Nephites certainly was meant.⁶ Significantly, almost all earlier reports by Mormon about the passage of time in the new year-count are silent as to when the start of the new reckoning occurred (3 Nephi 2:10-11, 13, 16-19; 3:22; 4:1, 4-5, 15-16; 5:7; 6:1, 4, 9-10, 14, 17; 7:1, 13-14, 21, 23). In fact, the next closest reference to what is meant by “our time” occurs in 3 Nephi 3:1: “the sixteenth year from the coming of Christ.” Prior to that reference, the next closest reference states that during the 10th year following the signs of the Messiah’s birth, “the Nephites began to reckon their time from this period when the sign was given, or from the coming of Christ” (3 Nephi 2:8). Clearly, the 10th and 16th years seem to have been singled out by Mormon. The reasons for such treatment also will be examined in the chapter on “Proposed Chronology.” In the “Occasional Papers” addendum to this source book, I have included a paper about one of the more likely reasons, “Interpreting *Forty and Two Years* in the Book of Mormon,” in which I introduce what appears to be a significant element of Nephite calendric practice recorded in the Book of Mormon.

The Chronological Note in 3 Nephi 8:5. The subjects of the segment discussed above (3 Nephi 8:1-4) similarly occur in the following segment (3 Nephi 8:5-18), which describes the great storm and earthquake that afflicted the people. The proposed structure of 3 Nephi 8:5-18 is not

⁶ Compare the more personal references to “our time” in Alma 30:33; 34:33.

identical to the first segment (3 Nephi 8:1-4). While the themes are similar, 3 Nephi 8:5-18 introduces them in a different order. The “A” lines in 3 Nephi 8:5-18 present the chronological facts identified in the record. The new “B” lines present the theme of greatness mentioned in the “C” lines of the preceding segment (just men, great earnestness and great doubting); however, the new “B” lines refer to the greatness of the storm, tempest, thunder, lightning, earthquake and destruction. The new “C” lines refer to knowledge, whereas in the prior segment that was the theme of the “B” line. The “D” lines now refer to the quaking and deformation of the earth, as the specific natural element that appears to have been understood as bringing forth the sign of three days of darkness. This was the sign that had been prophesied to bless the believers and destroy the wicked (e.g., 1 Nephi 12:4-6; 19:10-12; 2 Nephi 25:13; 26:3-9). The first stanza of the new segment (3 Nephi 8:5-7, with italics and structure added) reads as follows:

And it came to pass
A₁ in the thirty and fourth year,
A₂ in the first *month*,
A₃ in the fourth *day* of the month,
B₁ there arose a *great storm*,
C_{1A} such an one as *never had been known in all the land*;
B_{2A} and there was also a *great and terrible tempest*,
B_{3A} and there was *terrible thunder*,
D_{1A} insomuch that it *did shake the whole earth*
E_{1A} as if it was *about to divide asunder*,
B_{4A} and there was *exceeding sharp lightnings*,
C_{1B} such as *never had been known in all the land*.⁷

In this stanza, line D_{1A} introduces the initial shaking of the earth and line E_{1A} foreshadows the changes that would occur to the land and people. In the two following stanzas of this segment (3 Nephi 8:8-12 and 12-18), the “D” lines continue the earthquake theme and the related destruction to cities, roads and earth, and, with the “E” lines, begin Mormon’s detailed description of the fulfillment of the prophecy of three days of darkness and the destruction of the wicked. All of this detail will be examined in subsequent parts of this chapter. Nonetheless, at this point, I will note that these new “D” and “E” lines concerning the earthquake and the cleansing of the land relate back to the miracles and signs, and the faults and mistakes of a person who seeks to become “cleansed every whit from his iniquity” (the “D” and “E” lines of the previous segment). The tasks of gaining faith in the Lord, acknowledging his commandments and one’s sins and errors, and enduring in thorough restitution and repentance may cause a person, at times, to tremble or shake with fear, guilt or sorrow (e.g., 1 Nephi 1:6; 22:23; 2 Nephi 28:28; Mosiah 15:26-27; 27:31; Alma 11:46). The process may seem to “divide asunder” one’s being, but the cleansing of the Lord’s atonement brings certain understanding, peace and power (e.g., Enos 1:1-17).

⁷ Capitalization, punctuation and spelling are as set forth in Smith, *The Book of Mormon* (1830), 470. This text also appears to have been typeset directly from the original manuscript rather than 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 addition of the word *that* after the phrase *came to pass* and Joseph Smith’s change of the last *was* to *were* for the 1837 edition. Skousen, ed., *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part Two*, 803. “[T]here is some evidence from transmission errors by Oliver Cowdery that he could have accidentally added the *that* here when he copied from [the original manuscript] into [the printer’s manuscript]; usage elsewhere in the text supports the lack of *that* when a following adverbial phrase provides a complex reference to the time of the event.” No material interpretive issues exist relative to the textual transmission of these verses. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part Five*, 3307-11.

The Fourth Day of the 34th Year. Mormon identified the date of the Messiah's birth as the day following the sign of the night without darkness and he recorded that the Lord said, speaking to Nephi just before that night came on, "[O]n the morrow come I into the world" and "I come unto my own" (3 Nephi 1:12-14, 19). Over nine years later, measured "from the time when the sign was given, which was spoken of by the prophets, that Christ should come into the world" (3 Nephi 2:7), the Nephites instituted a new year-count by reckoning back to "this period when the sign was given, or from the coming of Christ" (3 Nephi 2:8). The year-count "from the coming of Christ" was thereby inaugurated by the believers and thereafter maintained by them until the time of Moroni more than 400 years later (3 Nephi 3:1; 4 Nephi 1:21, 48; Mormon 3:4; compare Moroni 10:1). It was a unique year-count for the believers, one that Mormon referred to as "our time" (3 Nephi 8:2).

After 33 years of "our time" had passed away (so, at the earliest, in the first day of the 34th year; 3 Nephi 8:2), "the people began to look with great earnestness for the sign which had been given by the prophet Samuel, the Lamanite" (3 Nephi 8:3). Just three days later, in the fourth day of the 34th year, a great storm and earthquake (3 Nephi 8:5-6) began the sign of three days of darkness. This sign, the beginning of which marked the death of the Messiah, was foretold anciently by Zenos (1 Nephi 19:10-12; 3 Nephi 10:16), recorded in the brass plates (3 Nephi 10:14-17), and reiterated by Nephi (1 Nephi 19:10) and Samuel (Helaman 14:14-27). Based on these reports from Mormon, the Messiah's mortal life may be deduced to have lasted 33 years (in whatever calendar the Nephites were using to measure "our time") plus three days. The length of the Messiah's mortal life is the single, most important fact for placing Book of Mormon chronology in its historical context.

The Sign in the Fourth Day. Samuel delivered the third of the five prophecies that give overall chronological structure to the Book of Mormon.⁸ An angel instructed Samuel concerning the expected signs of the Messiah's birth, death and resurrection, and then commanded Samuel to deliver the message to the Nephites (Helaman 13:7; 14:9, 26, 28). The signs of the birth and their fulfillment have been examined in the chapters on "Chronological Structure"⁹ and "Jesus' Birth."¹⁰ The signs of the Messiah's death and resurrection, as prophesied by Samuel and others, also were examined in the chapter on "Chronological Structure."¹¹ As described in that chapter, the prophetic statements included the following:

Elements of the Signs of the Messiah's Death and Resurrection	Nephi	Samuel
33 years pass away from the Messiah's birth		Helaman 13:29; 3 Nephi 8:1-4
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 break 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

⁸ See the introduction, "Chronological Structure within the Book of Mormon" and part three, "The Prophecy of Three Days of Darkness" in the chapter on "Chronological Structure."

⁹ See part two, "The Five-year Prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite."

¹⁰ See part two, "Samuel's Five-year Prophecy Fulfilled."

¹¹ See part three, "The Prophecy of Three Days of Darkness," especially 5-9.

Elements of the Signs of the Messiah's Death and Resurrection	Nephi	Samuel
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

The initial focus of this chapter on “Jesus’ Death and Resurrection” is on Book of Mormon texts describing the fulfillment of Samuel’s prophecy that, after the Messiah had lived for a period of 33 years, the sign of his death and resurrection would occur (compare Helaman 13:29; 14:20-27; 3 Nephi 8:1-4). The description will include the elements known prior to Samuel’s mission and mentioned by Nephi, as well as the elements added by the angel for Samuel to deliver. In part one, the focus will be on the texts describing the great disturbance in the air. In part two, the examination reviews the destructions of air, fire, water and earth. Part three considers issues linked to the resulting human destruction. The principle of thoroughness requires me to study relevant information from outside sources. Hebrew and Christian scriptures, secular history and other relevant information will be examined in subsequent parts and, if possible, synchronized and combined with the chronology presented by the Book of Mormon. This process has been used to study Lehi’s escape from Jerusalem and is being used in examining the time of the Messiah’s birth. Placing the chronological details of the Book of Mormon in their broader historical context, in a logically supportable way and using a current calendar for ease of understanding, requires the use of rational principles of interpretation.¹²

The “Flexible Reading” Alternative. Despite the clarity of Mormon’s description of the length of time between the signs of the Messiah’s birth and death, Jeffrey R. Chadwick has argued for what he termed “a flexible reading of the Book of Mormon regarding the length of Jesus’s life.”¹³ Not only is it instructive to identify Chadwick’s “flexible reading” process, but it is worthwhile to compare the results of Chadwick’s proposed process with those produced by the rational principles identified and used in this source book. In an appendix to the chapter on “Jesus’ Birth,” Chadwick’s chronology regarding the Messiah’s birth will be examined in detail. In this introduction, his argument for the length of Jesus’ life being “closer to thirty-three years and three or four months”¹⁴ is analyzed.

Chadwick’s “flexible reading” process concerning the length of Jesus’ life did not use the rational principle of thoroughness. Instead of first determining, through a thorough examination, what the Book of Mormon said about the length of the Messiah’s mortal life, Chadwick focused on what he described as “three primary issues” or “historical and New Testament issues.”¹⁵ According to his brief outline of those issues, Chadwick created the *a priori* assumption that “Jesus *must* have lived a few months longer than thirty-three full years.”¹⁶

¹² The rational principles that establish a logical process for interpreting the Book of Mormon are discussed in “Rational Interpretation of the Book of Mormon” in the first chapter of this source book.

¹³ Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ,” *BYU Studies* 49/4 (2010):4-38, at 21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11, 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20, italics added.

This beginning point for Chadwick's interpretation is perplexing. Given the disagreements that have occurred concerning historical and New Testament texts, their historicity and historiography, their languages, interpretation, doctrines, calendars and chronologies (very little of which Chadwick mentions in his article), one can only wonder why he undertook an analysis with external sources controlling the interpretation of the Book of Mormon. The more rational approach is for interpretation of the Book of Mormon to begin with a thorough understanding of the text of the book itself. The text was dictated and inscribed in English less than 200 years ago. The original documents associated with its printing in 1830 are, for the most part, still in existence. They have been analyzed by diligent scholars using the latest scientific tools and have been published in typographical facsimile for all to examine.¹⁷ The experiences of dozens of people who knew Joseph Smith and associated with him (many during the dictation, writing and printing process) were recorded less than two centuries ago and are readily available for study.¹⁸ One cannot begin with a more specific and settled textual foundation than that contained in the Book of Mormon.

Chadwick's *a priori* assumption (that "Jesus must have lived a few months longer than thirty-three full years"), having been determined apart from the Book of Mormon text, then required Chadwick to show (through his "flexible reading" process) how the Book of Mormon would support the assumption. To justify inserting three or four months (apparently about 90 to 120 days) before the start of the first Nephite year measured "from the coming of Christ," Chadwick merely stated, with rhetorical emphasis, that "the account in 3 Nephi does *not* specifically explain ... whether the Nephites counted back to the actual day of the sign of Jesus's birth (3 Ne. 1:15-19) as the beginning day of their new 'year one,' or whether they had continued to utilize their regular monthly count and had simply regarded the normal arrival of their next New Year's Day after the sign of his birth as the onset of their new 'year one.'"¹⁹

Chadwick's statement may confuse or mislead some readers. When stripped of its rhetorical wrapping, it merely speculates that the Nephites had available to them two very different techniques for starting the new year-count "from the coming of Christ." The technique actually described by Mormon in 3 Nephi 2:7-8 involved reckoning back to the period of the signs or the actual day of the Messiah's coming (which permitted some question above as to the way in which the Nephites understood and organized that two-day or one-and-one-half-day or one-day period). Chadwick's statement assumes (on the basis of his *a priori* assumption) that the technique described by Mormon has no greater interpretive value than Chadwick's additional speculations that the Nephites' new year-count: first, was reckoned back to a "regular" and "normal" New Year's Day; and, second, ignored (other than in name) the day that *actually* was pronounced in multiple revelations, that *actually* was signified by a prior night without darkness and that *actually* was linked to the advent of a new star. I suggest that those actual facts of the text are the ones that should be emphasized. Indeed, Chadwick's statement also appears to speculate that Mormon

¹⁷ The publications planned and produced by FARMS at Brigham Young University consist of at least nine volumes. Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*; idem, *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part One*; idem, *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Part Two*; and six volumes authored by Royal Skousen, entitled *Analysis of Textual Variants in the Book of Mormon* and published by FARMS in 2004 through 2009.

¹⁸ John W. Welch, "The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon," in John W. Welch, ed., with Erick B. Carlson, *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820-1844* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press and Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 2005), 77-213. This article compiles and re-publishes 202 documents containing the comments and recollections of nearly 90 individuals (some published in newspapers) who tell a remarkably consistent story about the origin of the Book of Mormon.

¹⁹ Chadwick, "Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ," 20, italics in the original.

intentionally or mistakenly withheld from his expected readers the real method used by the Nephites for measuring their new year-count.²⁰

Chadwick's assumptions and speculations were not true to the text. While it is true that Mormon did not explain which of two very different potential techniques the Nephites chose between, Mormon did describe the *single* technique that they used. The text of 3 Nephi 2:7-8 cannot be ignored, overlooked or relegated to the same interpretive value as a string of assumptions and speculations mandated by an *a priori* assumption. Chadwick's assumptions and speculations violate the principles of rational reserve, thoroughness, simplicity and consistency. His "flexible reading" process appears not to be as much concerned with reading the Book of Mormon, as with giving greater interpretive value to speculations about what is not in the Book of Mormon and to external sources that are assumed to supersede the Book of Mormon text. "Flexible reading" turns out to be just fictionalization based on an *a priori* assumption.

The text of the Book of Mormon can be interpreted in accordance with rational principles and without Chadwick's string of assumptions and speculations. The believers had anticipated the Messiah's birth for 600 years. Throughout the 600-year period, generations of believers, led by an holy order that maintained, taught and practiced the principles and ordinances of the doctrine of Christ and the law of Moses, measured their time from Lehi's departure from Jerusalem. That religion required steadfast observation of the year-count. Even after the inauguration of the reign of the judges, the year-count of Lehi's era was maintained. After Samuel's prophecies were delivered, the believers were threatened with a murderous purge if the two crucial days, separated by a night without darkness, did not occur. Then, the astonishing signs occurred and the believers' lives were saved. My examinations of these points in previous chapters of this source book refer to dozens of supporting Book of Mormon texts. Mormon's description of the technique used to start the new year-count "from the coming of Christ" emphasized the vital and eternal meaning of the signs (3 Nephi 2:7-8). Moroni, more than 420 years after the signs, still referred to this fulfillment of prophecy in connection with the year-count (Moroni 10:1). The signs had incalculable value for the believers. Chadwick's ill-advised assumptions and speculations ignore, overlook or minimize the interpretive value of these textual facts.

Chadwick's *a priori* assumption not only contradicted the text of 3 Nephi 8:5, but his assumption would comply with the principle of natural uniformity only if another set of at least three assumptions were adopted. According to his preferred formulation of the *a priori* assumption, the signs of the Messiah's birth occurred three or four months prior to the Nephites' "regular" and "normal" New Year's Day. Since the "regular" and "normal" year-count of the judges (who continued to rule the Nephites at that time) used a calendar with at least eleven months in it (Alma 49:1), the signs must have been seen well into the latter half of the 92nd year, perhaps in the last quarter of the year. Mormon expressly stated, however, that the conflict regarding Samuel's prophesied signs occurred in the commencement of the 92nd year (3 Nephi 1:4-9), not in the latter part of the year, as Chadwick's *a priori* assumption would seem to require.

Chadwick's proposed chronology can be squared with Alma 49:1 and 3 Nephi 1:4-9 if it is assumed that: (1) Samuel's five-year prophecy was inaccurate by many months, perhaps even an

²⁰ If an interpreter sets out to proclaim that Mormon or any of the other Book of Mormon writers made an error, the interpreter ought to be prepared to present a rationally principled analysis of the relevant text and not rely on speculation. I have suggested that Mormon's use of the word "first" in the preface of Third Nephi appears to be erroneous and, to justify that suggestion, the chapter on "Lehi's Escape" seeks to present a thorough and principled analysis of the relevant text. The principle of consistency requires that the relevant sources must unmistakably indicate an error and the error ought to be understandable. Any error that is assumed without a thorough analysis likely will turn out to be an inadequately considered interpretation.

entire Nephite year (depending on when in the 86th year of the judges Samuel prophesied to the Nephites); (2) the dispute and uproar over his prophecy persisted for months following the start of the 92nd year; and (3) the non-believers kept up their revolutionary fervor for months without resorting to violence. I will suggest here that the more likely chronology is one which does not require these three unnecessary assumptions, but relies on the text and has the signs closely follow the prophesied time for their appearance, with the instigation of an uproarious religious and political revolt just before the signs occurred and the prophet Nephi's immediate pleading with the Lord for his people—all in the commencement of the 92nd year of the judges, rather than extending out to the last few months of that year. My textual support and reasoning for this disagreement with Chadwick will be provided in the appendix in the chapter on "Jesus' Birth."

Finally, Chadwick's proposed chronology also speculated that the Nephites' New Year's Day fell in the spring, that it occurred consistently in the spring because of the Nephites' observation of a spring Passover in accordance with the law of Moses, and that each of the three separate year-counts (the eras counted from Lehi's escape, the commencement of the reign of the judges and the coming of Christ) used identical year-lengths, probably counted with a calendar of 365 days.²¹ Surprisingly, Chadwick's speculations do not appear to have taken into account the astronomical fact that over a 600-year period (counted with a 365-day calendar), a spring New Year's Day at the time of Lehi would migrate, every four calendar years, about one day earlier in the solar year,²² so that by the time of the Messiah's birth, the New Year's Day would have occurred 145 days earlier in the solar year (approximately November in the modern western calendar). The principle of natural uniformity cannot be ignored or overlooked when one interprets the Book of Mormon text.

To his credit, Chadwick may have attempted to meet the requirements of this principle when he stated that it was "virtually certain that the years referred to in 3 Nephi were 365 days long, the same length as the ancient Jewish lunar-solar year, and the same length as the modern secular calendar year."²³ I would agree with part of this assertion, but only as to the length of the years measured "from the coming of Christ." Unfortunately for Chadwick's assertion, his supporting statements are incorrect. The year length in the modern secular calendar year is not always 365 days because of the addition of a 366th day every leap year. Moreover, the Jewish year actually varied from either 12 moons (usually 354 days each) in the majority of years to 13 moons (usually 384 days each) in the leap years. Hence, at the end of any multiple-year period of ancient Jewish time-keeping, the *average* number of days per year for the period may or may not have closely approximated 365 days per year.

By referring only to the length of the years "in 3 Nephi," was Chadwick implying that the Nephite years mentioned in earlier books of the Book of Mormon may have been measured with a different calendar than one with 365 days? Endnote 49 of his article indicates that Chadwick's answer would be, "No," but I would agree with such an implication.²⁴ However, these calendric

²¹ Chadwick, "Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ," 18-21, 34-35 ns.49, 51.

²² The difference between a 365-day calendar and a solar year of about 365.2422 days is the reason for the insertion, approximately every four years, of an extra day during our leap year.

²³ Chadwick, "Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ," 18.

²⁴ See, e.g., Randall P. Spackman, "Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates," *FARMS Preliminary Report SPA-93* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1993); idem, "The Jewish/Nephite Lunar Calendar," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 48-59. See also John L. Sorenson, "Comments on Nephite Chronology," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (1993): 207-11; idem, *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life* (Provo, Utah: Research Press, FARMS, 1998), 165.

issues surely deserve their own chapter. At this point, it is vital to note that the foregoing calendric, chronological and astronomical issues exist, that they cannot be ignored or overlooked in any rational interpretation of Book of Mormon chronology and that the principle of natural uniformity must be maintained in any discussion of the passage of time encompassed by the Book of Mormon lineage history. In the chapter on "Calendars," alternative and potentially relevant calendars were presented. In the chapter on "Proposed Chronology," the alternatives will be examined in the context of all of the information gathered in this present chapter, the following chapter and the preceding chapters. This chapter will focus on issues associated with the fulfillment of the prophecy of three days of darkness. In part one of this chapter, the great storm will be examined.