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The Gospel According to Mormon

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Noel B. Reynolds

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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MORMON

Noel B. Reynolds

Abstract: *Although scholarly investigation of the Book of Mormon has increased significantly over the last three decades, only a tiny portion of that effort has been focused on the theological or doctrinal content of this central volume of LDS scripture. This paper identifies three inclusions that promise definitions of the doctrine or gospel of Jesus Christ and proposes a cumulative methodology to explain how these definitions work. This approach reveals a consistently presented, six-part formula defining “the way” by which mankind can qualify for eternal life. In this way the paper provides a starting point for scholarly examinations of the theological content of this increasingly influential religious text. While the names of the six elements featured in Mormon’s gospel will sound familiar to students of the New Testament, the meanings he assigns to these may differ substantially from traditional Christian discourse in ways that make Mormon’s characterization of the gospel or doctrine of Christ unique. The overall pattern suggested is a dialog between man and God, who initially invites all people to trust in Christ and repent. Those who respond by repenting and seeking baptism will be visited by fire and by the Holy Ghost, which initiates a lifelong interaction, leading the convert day by day in preparation for the judgment, at which she may finally be invited to enter the kingdom of God.*

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It may seem strange that even though The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is now widely recognized for its membership growth and its increasing social significance, the canonical LDS scriptures receive little scholarly attention outside of Mormondom. While a continually growing literature tries to find new and convincing explanations for the content and production of the Book of Mormon, only a few studies focus on the doctrinal messages of the book itself — on what it teaches. Over 150 million copies of the Book of Mormon have now been published in 82 languages by the Utah-based church,¹ and the book itself is now published by a growing list of academic and secular presses.

The following article finds a consistent “doctrine of Christ” or “gospel of Jesus Christ” taught throughout the text that displays both similarities to and differences from the way to salvation laid out in the Bible. Three definitional passages are identified and analyzed. The full content of this gospel formula can be established through a cumulative analysis of the partial statements included in each of these three passages. It is further claimed that the results of this analysis open the way to a much richer and more systematic interpretation of the numerous sermons and prophecies reported throughout the Book of Mormon. In this way, the text is found to reward readers who are willing to assume that it may be a redacted whole in the same sense that Robert Alter has explained his interpretive approach to Genesis and other materials.²

While this paper is not the place for a comprehensive account of the Book of Mormon, a brief description might help some readers understand a few basic things about the book. The text presents itself as an abridgment of the writings of a long series of Nephite prophets who lived in the western hemisphere between 570 BCE and 421 CE. The abridgment was produced by Mormon, one of the last of these prophets, from whom the book takes its title. Mormon describes the first 145 pages (of the current official 531-page LDS edition) as an insertion authored by Nephi, the first of the Nephite writers, and by his immediate successors. Nephi himself characterized that contribution as a condensed rewriting of a much longer record compiled over the three previous decades by both his father and himself. Through a series of circumstances that interrupted the translation process, this account replaces Mormon’s abridgment for the first 400 years of Nephite history. Most of the remaining text

1. This is based on information posted on the LDS Church’s official website, accessed on January 3, 2015: <http://newsroom.lds.org/article/book-of-mormon>.

2. See Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2004), 12.

— the major portion — consists of Mormon’s abridgment of records from the last half-millennium of Nephite civilization. The final chapters are presented as additions by Mormon’s son Moroni, whom he had charged to wrap up the record and conceal it where it could be preserved for a future prophet who would be called to restore the gospel of Jesus Christ to a Christian world that by then would have lost its way.

While on first impression the book reads like a history of this Nephite civilization, closer analysis reveals that this gospel or doctrine of Christ provides both the animating purpose and the connective thread through the entire text. For most purposes, it is accurate to describe Mormon as the self-proclaimed redactor of the whole text — inasmuch as it was his choice to insert the early Nephi material, and his son’s appendices contain mostly sermons given at some point by Mormon himself — with some closing comments by Moroni. On that basis, it may be fair to refer to the Book of Mormon as “the gospel according to Mormon.”

This study begins with three passages in the Book of Mormon that explicitly promise definitions of the doctrine or gospel of Jesus Christ. But none of the three definitions is presented in the way modern readers might expect. Rather, each offers a series of statements focusing on different actions or events related to each other as parts of *the way* that leads to eternal life. On first reading, these could easily seem disconnected or even contradictory — especially if read from the perspective of traditional Christian theologies. But when all these statements and their main elements are examined cumulatively, a well-defined account of this gospel emerges. The process by which men and women can come unto Christ and be saved is clear and multi-stepped. While the terminology sounds familiar to readers of the New Testament, the assemblage, definitions, and connections do not match up readily with traditional Christian interpretations of the Bible. The picture of the whole is almost never fully articulated in one place. Instead, we find a series of partial statements of this gospel — each of which is designed to add detail and complexity.

Three Core Passages Define the Gospel of Jesus Christ

The Book of Mormon contains three extraordinary, though widely ignored passages or *inclusios*. Each of these is marked off with bookend statements explicitly labeling it as an explanation or definition of the gospel or the doctrine of Jesus Christ. The combination of statements of definitional intent within obvious *inclusios* requires readers to try to understand the included statements as parts of the promised definition. It makes evident that the series of partial statements are to be understood

together as wholes — rather than as the congeries of disparate elements they may seem to be at first reading. The analytical method employed below explicitly collects the repeated elements in each passage and concludes that they are each to be included in the definition.

These three passages are further linked in that each of them presents this message in Christ’s own voice and in one case in the Father’s voice in tandem with Christ’s. Each passage presents the same six basic elements of the gospel message, but only twice do we see a complete list presented in any single statement. Rather the elements are each mentioned several times in different combinations with each other — combinations that enrich and expand the reader’s understanding of each as well as their connections to the other elements. But the full list becomes apparent only when all these partial statements are analyzed in a cumulative way. With this analysis in place, it then becomes evident that the Book of Mormon teaches the same message — in this same way — to the end of the book.

The first of these basic passages occurs as a summary teaching by Nephi, the first prophetic writer in the Book of Mormon. Both the second and third passages are recorded by Mormon, the final prophet/writer of the Nephite saga, as part of his abbreviated account of the post-resurrection visit and teachings of Jesus Christ to the Nephite people.

1. Nephi’s Farewell Address (2 Nephi 31)

Nephi grounds this presentation of the doctrine of Christ in his new and expanded reportage of a vision received over 40 years previously.³ We now learn that when he saw the baptism of Jesus Christ in vision, he also heard the voices of the Father and the Son alternating in explaining the meaning and role of baptism and other elements of their gospel. Nephi quotes each of them three times as he gradually unfolds the interrelationship of the six basic elements of the full gospel message.

Nephi’s account presents a gospel that describes an active, unending dialogic process by which men can be saved in the kingdom of God.⁴ The process begins with Christ’s command to all men that they follow him in humbling themselves before the Father (repenting) and in witnessing to the Father by baptism in water, that they take the name of Christ upon them, and that they are willing to keep Christ’s commandments. Nephi clarifies a few verses later that these steps require (1) “unshaken *faith*”

3. See 1 Nephi 11:27.

4. I have discussed the dialogic character of the gospel process in greater detail in “Understanding Christian Baptism through the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51:2 (2012), 11-13.

or trust in Christ. Nephi sees two stages in this gospel process. The first he labels “the gate by which ye should enter” (2 Nephi 31:17). This is the response of the convert who (2) *repents* and is (3) *baptized in water* as a witness to the Father, thus engaging Christ’s call that she follow his example of obedience to the Father. The second stage of this process begins with the Father’s promised, subsequent response to all who repent “with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent” (v. 13), as he sends them (4) “*a remission of sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost*” (v. 17). This profound spiritual experience raises the convert to a new level of life — the second stage in this dialogic process. For, having received a remission of sins, she can now “speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel” (v. 13). In this response, the Holy Ghost also “witnesses of the Father and the Son” (v. 18), significantly reinforcing and elevating the faith of the convert. This promised response to the sincere convert — who entered the strait gate through faith, repentance, and baptism by water — has now admitted or lifted her to the “straight and narrow path” that leads to eternal life (v. 18).⁵ But this is only the second stage of the dialogic process described in this text. The voices of both the Father and the Son are quoted, indicating that only those who (5) *endure to the end* will (6) *be saved* (v. 15). Reviewing, Nephi asks rhetorically if after baptism, “all is done” (v. 19)? The answer is negative. The convert “must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ” and “endure to the end” if she will “have eternal life” (v. 20) For as the Father had previously affirmed, “he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved” (v. 15) — the third and final stage in the dialogic process of coming to Christ and the Father.

While these six basic elements of the doctrine or gospel of Christ are each mentioned multiple times in Nephi’s brief exposition, only at the end does he bring them all together.⁶ In all previous discussion, these elements are stated in terms of a multitude of interconnections between different combinations of two or three of them, statements which gradually deepen and extend the reader’s understanding of each one and of its role in the larger process. This mode of presentation makes something else clear: Whenever some pair or selection of these six elements is mentioned, the entire set is implicitly invoked. Each is an essential part of *the way*, and there is no shorter way. When Nephi

5. Where the wording or punctuation of my references to the text varies from the official LDS edition published in 1981, I am using the Yale critical text. See, Royal Skousen (ed.), *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (Yale University Press), 2009.

6. See 2 Nephi 31:19–20.

quotes the Father saying, “he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved” (v. 15), the reader knows that four other elements — faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, and baptism of both water and of the Holy Ghost — are necessarily implied.⁷

The following analysis demonstrates this pattern in the text of 2 Nephi 31. The full text is presented with interpretive formatting. Bolded headings indicate the various structural elements of the passage — including the opening and closing of the *inclusio*. The 23 statements that include at least one reference to a gospel element are numbered sequentially at the left margin. Additional formatting highlights the parallelism of the final two sentences. Parenthetical insertions identify the gospel elements⁸ I find mentioned or implied — either by name or by synonyms. Often these elements will be stated negatively (indicated with ~), but there is little difficulty in deciding which standard element is negated. In some cases, I have interpreted pronouns, etc., as implicit repetitions of previously stated elements. And frequently other synonymous terms or phrases will appear. In most cases, the synonymous relationship can be readily established by reference to associated passages in this same text or other Book of Mormon passages that make the linkage explicit.⁹ I have been moderately aggressive in identifying these elements to emphasize their centrality for this passage. But the conclusions would not be weakened by a lower count.

The essential synonymous terms in this passage are listed in the following glossary:

1. The doctrine of Christ = the gospel of Christ or “the way.”
2. Humbling oneself before the Father = repentance.
3. Covenanting that one will obey God’s commandments = repentance.

7. In a subsequent companion article, I have demonstrated that Nephi here employs the rhetorical device of merismus, which occurs frequently in the Bible. The list form of merismus can invoke a well-known longer list of elements in readers’ minds by mentioning only a few members of the list. This technique is used hundreds of times throughout the Book of Mormon in references to the gospel and particularly in the three definitional passages under review here. See Noel B. Reynolds, “Biblical *Merismus* in Book of Mormon Gospel References,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 26 (2017), 106-34.

8. The six gospel elements are cited as (F), faith in Jesus Christ; (R), repentance; (W), baptism of water; (H) baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; (E), enduring to the end; and (S), saved.

9. For the sake of brevity, I have not provided detailed documentation of these synonymous relationships here.

4. Witnessing to the Father that one has covenanted to obey the commandments = baptism of water.
5. The gate by which ye should enter = repentance and water baptism.
6. The straight and narrow path = enduring to the end.
7. Being saved = eternal life.
8. Getting into the straight and narrow path = repentance, water baptism, and enduring to the end.
9. Relying wholly upon the merits of him = faith in Christ.
10. Pressing forward with steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men = enduring to the end.

2 Nephi 31:2 - 21

Opening

2 Wherefore, the things which I have written sufficeth me, save it be a few words which I must speak concerning **the doctrine of Christ;**

Preliminary comment

wherefore, I shall speak unto you plainly, according to the plainness of my prophesying.

3 For my soul delighteth in plainness; for after this manner doth the Lord God work among the children of men. For the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding.

Setting the context

4 Wherefore, I would that ye should remember that I have spoken unto you concerning that prophet which the Lord showed unto me, that should baptize the Lamb of God, which should take away the sins of the world.

1. 5 And now, if the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be baptized by water (W), to fulfil all righteousness, O then, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water (W).

2. 6 And now, I would ask of you, my beloved brethren, wherein the Lamb of God did fulfil all righteousness in being baptized by water (W)?
3. 7 Know ye not that he was holy? But notwithstanding he being holy, he showeth unto the children of men that, according to the flesh he humbleth himself before the Father (R), and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments (W).
4. 8 Wherefore, after he was baptized with water (W) the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove (H).
5. 9 And again, it showeth unto the children of men the straitness of the path (E), and the narrowness of the gate (R, W), by which they should enter, he having set the example before them.
6. 10 And he said unto the children of men: Follow thou me (F).
7. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, can we follow Jesus (F) save we shall be willing to keep the commandments of the Father (R, W)?
8. 11 And the Father said: Repent ye (R), repent ye (R), and be baptized in the name of my Beloved Son (W).
9. 12 And also, the voice of the Son came unto me, saying: He that is baptized in my name (W), to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost (H), like unto me;
10. wherefore, follow me (F), and do the things which ye have seen me do (R,W).
11. 13 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I know that if ye shall follow the Son, with full purpose of heart (F), acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins (R), witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism (W)—yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water (W), according to his word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost (H); yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost (H); and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel.

12. 14 But, behold, my beloved brethren, thus came the voice of the Son unto me, saying: After ye have repented of your sins (R), and witnessed unto the Father that ye are willing to keep my commandments, by the baptism of water (W), and have received the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost (H), and can speak with a new tongue, yea, even with the tongue of angels, and after this should deny me (\sim E), it would have been better for you that ye had not known me (\sim S).
13. 15 And I heard a voice from the Father, saying: Yea, the words of my Beloved are true and faithful. He that endureth to the end (E), the same shall be saved (S).
14. 16 And now, my beloved brethren, I know by this that unless a man shall endure to the end (E), in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved (S).
15. 17 Wherefore, do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do (R, W);
16. for, for this cause have they (R, W) been shown unto me, that ye might know the gate by which ye should enter. For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance (R) and baptism by water (W); and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost (H).
17. 18 And then are ye in this strait and narrow path (E) which leads to eternal life (S); yea, ye have entered in by the gate (R, W); ye have done according to the commandments of the Father and the Son; and ye have received the Holy Ghost (H),
18. which witnesses of the Father and the Son, unto the fulfilling of the promise which he hath made, that if ye entered in by the way (R, W) ye should receive (H).
19. 19 And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path (R, W, E), I would ask if all is done?
20. Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him (F), relying wholly upon the merits of him (F) who is mighty to save (S).

21. 20 Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ (F), having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men (E).
22. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward (F), feasting upon the word of Christ (H), and endure to the end (E), behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life (S).

Concluding comment

23. And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and **there is none other way** nor name given under heaven
whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God (S).

Closing

And now, behold, this is **the doctrine of Christ,**
and **the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of**
the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,
which is one God, without end. Amen.

This analysis identifies 23 statements that explicitly mention one or more of the six gospel elements by name or by a synonym that can be linked to that name in the text. The first 11 statements (1–11) focus first on the tight linkage between repentance and water baptism and from then on the distinction between water baptism and the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost. The next three statements (12–14) go on to make clear that as wonderful as this spiritual experience might be, it is only an initiation into that straight and narrow path that leads to salvation. Any convert who then denies the Son or fails to endure in obeying the commandments to the end of her life cannot be saved. At this point, five of the six elements have been mentioned explicitly, and the next seven statements review this with doubled emphasis on the four core concepts of repentance and baptism by water and by the Holy Ghost and the necessity of enduring to the end. Approaching his summary, Nephi points to the fact that all those elements are possible only for those who have “unshaken *faith*” in Jesus Christ, “relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty *to save*” (v. 19) — finally stating the most succinct version: naming only the first and last elements of this gospel formula. The final restatement again links this starting point of faith in

Jesus Christ directly to the final or ending elements — enduring to the end and eternal life (v. 20). Nephi then establishes his *inclusio* by linking back to the introduction of “the doctrine of Christ” in verse two and by expanding that mention with his personal witness that “this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the Kingdom of God... . This is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end” (v. 21).

This single passage, with its 23 statements linking key elements of the doctrine of Christ inside one *inclusio* would be sufficient in and of itself to establish this six-point formula as Nephi’s or Mormon’s concept of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But Mormon goes on in later chapters of the book to include two similar passages. Both of these are briefer in length and in the number of separate statements they include. Each is tailored to a different historical context, but there is no variation in the basic six-element formula. And each is presented again inside a similar *inclusio* and in the voice of Jesus Christ — in these instances without interventions or interpretation.

2. Jesus’s First Instruction to His Nephite Disciples (3 Nephi 11:31–39)

The second paradigmatic passage is placed near the beginning of Jesus’s teachings to the Nephites when he appeared to them almost a year after his death and resurrection in Jerusalem. Like the previous one, it stands out as an *inclusio*, beginning and ending with the statement that “this is my doctrine.” It serves as a preface to the Book of Mormon version of the New Testament Sermon on the Mount, which is commonly referred to by students of the Book of Mormon as “the sermon at the temple.” It is presented entirely in the voice of the post-resurrection Jesus Christ. My analysis employs the previous format and identifies 12 statements that mention one or more of the previously identified gospel elements as they occur in 3 Nephi 11:31–39. The analysis also includes two extensions (possibly foreshadowed by the triple opening to the *inclusio*), which add eight more statements from immediately following material, as will be explained below. A brief expansion of the earlier glossary of terms may help readers identify some key synonymous terminology:

11. Believe in me = faith in Jesus Christ.
12. Inherit the kingdom of God = be saved.
13. Be damned = negation of be saved.

14. Receive these things = receive the Holy Ghost.
15. Give heed unto the words of these twelve = faith in Jesus Christ.
16. Believe in your words = faith in Christ.
17. Come down in the depths of humility = repent.
18. Become as a little child = enduring to the end.¹⁰
19. Look unto me = faith in Christ, repentance, and baptism.
20. Ye shall live = eternal life.

3 Nephi 11:31 - 39, 12:1-2, 15:9

Triple opening

31 Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, I will declare unto you **my doctrine**.

32 And **this is my doctrine**, and **it is the doctrine** which the Father hath given unto me;

1. and I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me (H);
2. and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent (R) and believe in me (F).
3. 33 And whoso believeth in me (F), and is baptized (W), the same shall be saved (S);
4. and they (F, W) are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God (S).
5. 34 And whoso believeth not in me (~F), and is not baptized (~W), shall be damned (~S).

Intermediate comment

35 Verily, verily, I say unto you, that **this is my doctrine**, and I bear record of it from the Father;

6. and whoso believeth in me (F) believeth in the Father also (F);
7. and unto him (F) will the Father bear record of me (H),
8. for he will visit him (F) with fire and with the Holy Ghost (H).
9. 36 And thus will the Father bear record of me (H),

10. I am leaning on Mosiah 3:19 and 3 Nephi 9:22 for this interpretation.

10. and the Holy Ghost will bear record unto him of the Father and me (H); for the Father, and I, and the Holy Ghost are one.
11. 37 And again I say unto you, ye must repent (R), and become as a little child (E), and be baptized in my name (W), or ye can in nowise receive these things (H).
12. 38 And again I say unto you, ye must repent (R), and be baptized in my name (W), and become as a little child (E), or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God (S).

Closing

39 Verily, verily, I say unto you, that **this is my doctrine**,

First extension

13. 1 AND it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words unto Nephi,¹¹ and to those who had been called, (now the number of them who had been called, and received power and authority to baptize, was twelve) and behold, he stretched forth his hand unto the multitude, and cried unto them, saying: Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve (F) whom I have chosen from among you to minister unto you, and to be your servants;
14. and unto them I have given power that they may baptize you with water (W);
15. and after that ye are baptized with water (W), behold, I will baptize you with fire and with the Holy Ghost (H);
16. therefore blessed are ye if ye shall believe in me (F) and be baptized (W), after that ye have seen me and know that I am (F).
17. 2 And again, more blessed are they who shall believe in your words (F) because that ye shall testify that ye have seen me, and that ye know that I am (F).
18. Yea, blessed are they who shall believe in your words (F), and come down into the depths of humility (R) and be baptized (W), for they shall be visited with fire and

11. For those not familiar with the Book of Mormon narrative, the Nephi referenced here is not the same Nephi referenced earlier in this paper. This particular Nephi lived approximately 600 years after the first one.

with the Holy Ghost (H), and shall receive a remission of their sins.

Second extension

19. 9 Look unto me (F, R, W), and endure to the end (E), and ye shall live (S);
20. for unto him that endureth to the end (E) will I give eternal life (S).

The first two statements (1–2) do begin at the beginning, making it clear that it is the Father who has commanded all men everywhere to repent and believe in Christ. Again, this emphasizes the dialogic nature of the gospel process, stating the appropriate response for those who receive the Father’s command. The next three repetitions (3–5) omit all mention of repentance, but emphasize the necessity of water baptism for all who believe in Christ, if they will be saved. Or, as stated negatively, those who do not believe and are not baptized will be damned. The next five statements (6–10) introduce the second stage of the dialogic process. Those who have responded appropriately to the Father’s command to believe will receive a visitation of fire and the Holy Ghost sent from the Father, a chief feature of which will be the witness of the Holy Ghost of the Father and of Christ, who also “bear record” of one another. Whereas this may be what is meant by the phrase “blessed are ye” that occurs in some of these passages and in the beatitudes which will follow soon after, I have not included that interpretation in the glossary or in this analysis. The *inclusio* in this passage concludes (11–12) after twice stating that the kingdom of God will be inherited only by those who repent, becoming as little children, and who are baptized in the name of Christ.

What is obviously missing from this passage (1–18) is an explicit reference to the much emphasized requirement in 2 Nephi 31 — that the convert must endure to the end in a new life — an elevated continuation of the dialogic process initiated in the first stage. This may be suggested by the twice-stated requirement that the convert must “become as a little child,” but this is nowhere made explicit. The delayed explicit introduction of this fifth element of the Nephite gospel serves to extend the *inclusio* through the next three chapters, where the rhetorical tension is finally resolved with a double statement of the necessity of enduring to the end to be able to receive eternal life (3 Nephi 15:9).

Between the formal ending of this *inclusio* and the eventual articulation of the missing gospel element, Mormon has placed a version

of the New Testament sermon on the mount. The dramatic shift that sets this insertion apart from the presentation of “the doctrine of Christ” in the prefacing *inclusio* consists of Jesus’s turning from the disciples — to whom alone this preface was given — to address the assembled multitude. For this enlarged audience, Jesus begins with three summary statements of the doctrine he has just presented in greater detail to the twelve disciples — using the format of the beatitudes that will follow. Blessed will be those who heed the disciples’ invitation to be baptized with water, for them will Jesus “baptize ... with fire and with the Holy Ghost.” And blessed will be those who will believe in Christ and be baptized. And blessed will be those who will believe in the disciples’ words about Jesus and “come down into the depths of humility” and be baptized, “for they shall be visited with fire and with the Holy Ghost,” receiving a remission of their sins (3 Nephi 12:1–2).

The first of these may be offering a definition of the phrase “blessed will be ...” as a reference to the fact that “them will Jesus baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 12:1–2) and not as a reference to eternal life — the ultimate reward of the faithful.

The placement of this sermon immediately after the incomplete presentation of the doctrine of Christ and immediately before the double statement of the missing requirement that all converts must endure to the end to be saved suggests strongly that the intervening sermon material be understood as direction on how converts are expected to endure to the end. The content of the sermon is obviously consistent with that suggestion. My inclusion in this analysis of the additional eight statements that occur after the formal *inclusio* on the doctrine of Christ given to the disciples (13–20) is based on this interpretation.

3. Jesus Reaffirms His Gospel (3 Nephi 27:13–21)

The third paradigmatic passage is presented as an explanation that Jesus gives to his disciples sometime after his first post-resurrection visit to the Nephites. Their prayer was to know the name he wanted them to use for his church. In response, he appears to them once again and explains that his gospel requires them to take his name upon them. And if the church teaches his gospel, it should be known by his name (3 Nephi 27: 5–10). Once again, we have an *inclusio* bounded by the statement that “this is my/the gospel” given in the voice of Jesus Christ. Some new synonyms also require additional expansion of the earlier-presented glossary:

21. Be filled = baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost. (See 3 Nephi 12:6)
22. I will hold guiltless = be saved.
23. Hewn down and cast into the fire = not saved.
24. Unclean thing = not repentant.
25. Wash their garments in my blood = faith, repentance, baptism of water, and baptism of the Holy Ghost.
26. Faithfulness unto the end = enduring to the end.
27. Come unto me = enduring to the end.¹²
28. Stand spotless before me at the last day = be saved.

3 Nephi 27:13 –22

Double opening

13 Behold I have given unto you **my gospel**,
and **this is the gospel** which I have given unto you

1. —that I came into the world to do the will of my Father (E), because my Father sent me.
2. 14 And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross
—and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, I might draw all men unto me — that as I have been lifted up by men, even so should men be lifted up by the Father to stand before me to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil. (S or ~S)
15 And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works (S or ~S).
3. 16 And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth (R) and is baptized in my name (W) shall be filled (H);
4. and if he (R, W, H) endureth to the end (E), behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world (S).

12. The 2015 version of this paper interpreted *come unto me* as synonymous with faith in Jesus Christ. However, as I have explained at length in “How ‘Come unto Me’ Fits into the Nephite Gospel,” *Religious Educator* 18:2 (2017), 15-29, I now understand this phrase as a reference to the process involved in enduring to the end.

5. 17 And he that endureth not unto the end (~E), the same is he that is also hewn down and cast into the fire (~S), from whence they can no more return, because of the justice of the Father.

Intermediate comment

18 And **this is the word which he hath given** unto the children of men. And for this cause he fulfilleth **the words which he hath given**, and he lieth not, but fulfilleth **all his words**.

6. 19 And no unclean thing (~R) can enter into his kingdom (S);
7. therefore nothing entereth into his rest (S) save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood (F, R, W, H), because of their faith (F), and the repentance of all their sins (R), and their faithfulness unto the end (E).
8. 20 Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth (R), and come unto me (E) and be baptized in my name (W), that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost (H), that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day (S).

Closing

21 Verily, verily, I say unto you, **this is my gospel**;

Extension

9. and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do (R, W, E);
10. for that which ye have seen me do (R, W, E) even that shall ye do;
11. 22 Therefore, if ye do these things (R, W, E) blessed are ye, for ye shall be lifted up at the last day (S).

This passage includes 11 partial statements of the gospel elements. The first two (1–2) point out how Jesus endured through to the cross and as a consequence became the judge who will allocate salvation to all men — according to their works. The next three (3–5) advance the central four elements of the gospel as the criteria by which men will be judged

and rewarded. The first of these three introduces the first stage of the dialogic process, specifying repentance and baptism as essential actions by the convert, which will invite the divine response of filling her with the Holy Ghost. The next two implicitly repeat these and link them to the second and third stages of enduring to the end and being saved.

After an intermediate comment identifying the gospel with “the word ... given unto the children of men,” the next two statements (6–7) go on to stress the necessity of faith and repentance and enduring to the end for those who would become clean and qualify for salvation. The eighth statement explicitly summarizes with a five-element version of the gospel without repeating the requirement of enduring just mentioned in the previous sentence. After closing the *inclusio*, this passage continues with a three-statement extension (also possibly foreshadowed by the double opening), in which the convert’s required actions of repentance, baptism, and enduring to the end are implicitly invoked three times as *works* that Jesus has done as *an example* for those who would follow him, implicitly referring back to statement #14 of the first *inclusio* in 2 Nephi 31, with the possible suggestion that the three may form a kind of literary unit.

Summary and Conclusions

The analyses offered for these three passages identify 150 explicit mentions or implicit references to six repeated elements of the gospel or doctrine of Jesus Christ, as the following chart summarizes:

Gospel Element	2 Nephi 31	3 Nephi 11–15	3 Nephi 27	Totals
Faith	8	15	2	25
Repentance	14	5	9	28
Baptism	19	10	7	36
Holy Ghost	9	8	4	21
Enduring	8	4	8	20
Saved	6	6	8	20
Totals	64	48	38	150

Because many of these identifications rest on interpretations, I would readily allow for some reasonable differences of interpretation. But these numbers could be increased or decreased considerably without changing the basic observation, that in each of these three definitional passages we have numerous repetitions of the same six basic elements of what is presented as a gospel formula or way to human salvation. Although the text

never presents this six-element list explicitly, the method of accumulation proposed here makes it clear that it is assumed by the author.

Analysis of the central religious teachings of the Book of Mormon is not yet well developed in the academic literature. This paper is intended to lay an initial foundation for such studies in the future. Recognizing that the text contains a trio of *inclusios* that claim to articulate a doctrine or gospel of Christ and that the repeated elements of these passages can be identified and accumulated, makes it possible to identify a clear, six-element doctrinal formula. The elements of the formula describe a three-stage dialogic process between the human recipient and the divine provider, a process that begins with the divine invitation to come to Christ through faith and repentance, and concludes with the divine invitation into eternal life

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